



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

PETSMART
Charities



Rescue Group Best Practices Guide

BY ABBY VOLIN

This publication (*Rescue Group Best Practices Guide*) is intended to provide general information about rescue best practices. The information contained in this publication is not legal advice and cannot replace the advice of qualified legal counsel licensed in your state. The Humane Society of the United States does not warrant that the information contained in this publication is complete, accurate, or up-to-date and does not assume and hereby disclaims any liability to any person for any loss or damage caused by errors, inaccuracies, or omissions.

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ABOUT PETSMART CHARITIES®

PetSmart Charities, Inc. is a non-profit animal welfare organization that saves the lives of homeless pets. More than 400,000 dogs and cats find homes each year through our adoption program in all PetSmart stores and our sponsored adoption events. PetSmart Charities grants more money to directly help pets in need than any other animal welfare group in North America, with a focus on funding spay/neuter services that help communities solve pet overpopulation. PetSmart Charities is a 501(c)(3) organization, separate from PetSmart, Inc. To learn more about how PetSmart Charities is working toward its vision of a lifelong, loving home for every pet, call 1-800-423-PETS (7387) or visit petsmartcharities.org.

ABOUT THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) is the nation's largest and most effective animal protection organization. Established in 1954, The HSUS seeks a humane and sustainable world for all animals—a world that will also benefit people. The HSUS is America's mainstream force against cruelty, abuse, and neglect, as well as the most trusted voice extolling the human-animal bond. The HSUS works to reduce suffering and to create meaningful social change by advocating for sensible public policies, investigating cruelty, enforcing existing laws, sharing information with the public about animal issues, joining with corporations on behalf of animal-friendly policies, and conducting hands-on programs that make ours a more humane world.

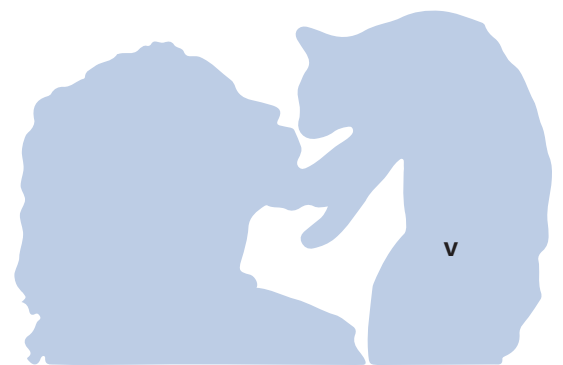
INTRODUCTION

RESCUE GROUPS ARE VITAL IN THE WORLD OF ANIMAL WELFARE AND ARE COLLECTIVELY RESPONSIBLE FOR SAVING HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF ANIMALS EVERY YEAR. Oftentimes, rescue groups go out of their way to take the cases that shelters do not have the resources to help, making their partnerships invaluable. They are incredible, lifesaving organizations. But what does it mean to be a rescue? Does it simply refer to an organization that takes in homeless animals and finds them a home? Does it mean being part of an organization with 501(c)(3) nonprofit status? Does it mean the rescue provides trap-neuter-return services to community cats? Actually, a rescue can meet all or none of these criteria.

This manual was designed to provide structure and guidance to all types of rescue groups. It describes best practices for these organizations and, perhaps more importantly, suggests ways to implement them to help rescues operate at their maximum potential. This guide can be used to evaluate the health of established organizations, as well as help new groups get off to a successful start.

While there is no one-size-fits-all way to run a rescue group, there are standards—both from an organizational and animal care standpoint—that all rescue organizations should meet. Above all, rescuers owe it to the animals in their care to run their rescue operations in the most professional, collaborative and humane manner.

Ultimately, as rescue groups adhere to best practices, they become more efficient and effective. This allows rescuers not only to humanely take in and adopt out more animals, but also build trust within the community, work successfully with other local animal welfare advocates and help solve the problem of pet homelessness on a community level.



SECTION 1

ORGANIZATIONAL STANDARDS



Rescue organizations should be run just like any other business. With a solid foundation in place, you will have more support to grow your rescue group, allowing you to bring in more animals and save more lives.

CREATING YOUR MISSION AND VISION

If you are thinking about starting a new rescue group, define your mission and vision before you do any other planning. Where is the greatest need in your community? What do you hope to accomplish and why? [Conducting a community assessment](#) can assist you in determining the type of help the animals in your community need.

Typically, forming a rescue group consists of creating an organization that takes in animals that have been transferred from a shelter, relinquished by their owner or found as a stray; fosters them in a home environment; and adopts them out. Although these foster-based organizations are crucial to lifesaving efforts, generally their mission is not to stop the problem of pets becoming homeless in the first place.

There are other ways to help. Consider the needs in your community *before* deciding what type of rescue group you want to start. Nearly every community could use more foster-based organizations, but if the market is already saturated with those, you may want to think about creating a prevention-based organization that keeps pets in their homes and stops them from entering the shelter and rescue system in the first place. Your organization can be at the bottom of a broken dam with buckets to lessen the deluge of rushing water or you can start from the top and plug the holes to prevent the water from leaking. Prevention-based organizations might focus on low-cost spay/neuter, lost-and-found, behavior assistance, legal assistance, pet food pantry operation or other valuable programs.

INCORPORATING AND APPLYING FOR 501(C)(3) TAX-EXEMPT STATUS

WHY: Incorporating as a business in your state is an easy way to show the world that your rescue group is a legitimate business venture and that you are treating it as such. Further, the corporate formation protects individuals in the organization from legal liability and debt incurred by the rescue group. More importantly, your organization has a significantly better chance of being approved for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status if you incorporate. And having that tax-exempt status is crucial for your organization's ability to grow. Not only is the organization exempt from federal income tax, but you can entice donors with a tax deduction for any contributions and apply for the many grants that are awarded only to nonprofit organizations. Nonprofits can also apply for a mailing permit that gives them a special reduced rate for mailings.

HOW: Check your state's requirements for incorporating a nonprofit with your state's corporate filing office (usually called the department of state, secretary of state or something similar) and check out [other resources](#). Contact the state office responsible for businesses to find out what your state's specific requirements are or check out the comprehensive state-specific [resources](#). Many offices will provide a packet of information on how to incorporate along with sample documents. You will also need to draft articles of incorporation and bylaws in conjunction with incorporating your organization, which are the primary rules governing the management of your corporation. Even if your state does not require bylaws as a matter of law, it is still a good idea to draft them as they define your business structure and specify how your organization will conduct its affairs.

You can find samples for [drafting articles of incorporation](#) and [state specific samples](#). When you are ready to apply for tax-exempt status, all the information you need is on the [IRS website](#). Keep in mind that it can take many months to obtain 501(c)(3) status, so do not get discouraged. Moreover, you may want to consult with an attorney or accountant who specializes in nonprofits, even if it is just to review the completed application.

Also remember to check if your state has specific licensing requirements, if any, for operating a shelter or rescue group. You can usually find any laws pertaining to animals in your state's agriculture code.

For more information, check out the Rescue Central resources on [Starting a Rescue Group](#), especially the presentation [Obtaining Tax Exemption for Your Organization](#).

FORMING YOUR TEAM

Every rescue group needs three layers of support to build a full team. At the top is the board of directors. These are the members who oversee the strategic direction, or long-term planning, of an organization. The next layer consists of staff, including an executive director, who runs the day-to-day operations of the rescue group. Some rescue organizations are able to pay a few staff members, but generally these groups rely on volunteers. It is still important to call these dedicated members “staff” regardless of whether they are paid, because it demonstrates that your organization is run professionally. Doing so also gives individuals a sense of ownership, responsibility and appreciation for the hours they contribute. The final layer of your team is the volunteers—people who help out on a regular basis by supporting the staff. Whether they foster animals, help out at adoption events, transport animals to veterinarian appointments or participate in countless other activities, volunteers are the lifeblood of any rescue group.

BUILDING A BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Every organization has a board of directors, which is a body of elected or appointed members who oversee the activities of the corporation. Their responsibilities are detailed in the organization’s bylaws, but typically, members of the board are responsible for governing the organization, appointing and reviewing the executive director, approving budgets, approving an organization’s policies and other similar tasks. Board members have an obligation of allegiance, care and duty to the organization. For rescue groups, it is important to recruit people who will help the organization fulfill its mission statement by providing advice and implementing long-term goals that will assist the organization plan for the future and create the vision of what it will become.

Board members are not the ones who run the day-to-day aspects of the rescue group (unless the organization has a “working board,” where board members double as staff), but instead are involved in strategic planning. That is, how will the organization get from where it is today to where it wants to be in a few years? The board of directors is a group who advances the organization’s mission by providing advice, money, time and expertise. A [sample strategic plan](#) devised and implemented by a board of directors may be helpful.

Generally, board members on working boards are expected to be heavily involved in strategic planning, fundraising, and policy decisions for the organization. When forming your board, think about the type of people who are going to help fulfill the organization’s mission and goals: Someone with fundraising abilities? Public

relations or marketing savvy? Legal or accounting abilities? Management background? Political connections? Choosing friends and family to serve on your board may be necessary at first, but once you become established you will want to be more strategic in selecting board members. An independent board is important for your organization's credibility. Having family members on the board could be viewed negatively, so it is an important point to consider.

Check the laws in your state to determine the exact number of people you need on a board, but at a minimum you will need to have a president, a secretary and a treasurer. The executive director is not normally a board member, but is instead accountable to the board of directors and also serves as the bridge between the board and the staff who carry out the day-to-day functions of the organization. Board members will need to be willing to commit their time and resources to the organization. You may want to implement term limits for members of the board or have non-voting members who are there exclusively in an advisory role. It is helpful to have a [job description](#) so that prospective members will know what will be expected of them.

Importantly, the board of directors is responsible for approving new contracts (such as foster agreements or adoption contracts) and authorizing certain individuals (usually the executive director, the board president and the board vice-president) to sign documents on the organization's behalf. You may also want the board to authorize specific individuals to sign agreements relevant to their area of expertise. For example, the board might allow the adoption coordinator to sign adoption contracts or authorize the volunteer coordinator to sign volunteer agreements.

In keeping with good practices and building a trustworthy organization, it is important for the board to create well-documented policies that foster transparency. For example, it is essential to have a conflict of interest policy for the board of directors, document retention policy, code of ethics, whistleblower policy and, if applicable, written compensation practices.

A strong board of directors is vital to the current success and future development of your rescue group. Pick your board members thoughtfully!

For more information, check out the Rescue Central resources on [Building Effective Boards](#).



BUILDING YOUR STAFF

While the Board of Directors is accountable for the long-term goals of the organization, the staff is responsible for running the day-to-day operations of the rescue group. After you have filed the articles of incorporation and applied to the IRS for tax-exempt status, the next important task is developing your team. Although the majority of your staff will be unpaid volunteers with other jobs and obligations, it is crucial that all individuals involved are committed to their positions to ensure that the rescue runs as smoothly as possible.

Do not put someone into a role simply because they offered or because you are eager to fill the position. The person's skills must align with the post. For example, the outgoing individual who loves meeting new people but has never balanced a checkbook would better serve the organization as a volunteer coordinator than the financial coordinator. Similarly, the individual who does not bat an eyelash at mounds of paperwork, yet gets easily stressed by demanding customers, might be a great fit for the records manager but not the adoption coordinator. Do not be afraid to move people around and try them in different roles until you have the right fit. Even though it may be difficult to leave a crucial position empty until you find the perfect match, in the long-run your organization will be much better off having the right people in place.

Below is a basic template to use in building your rescue group's staff, including suggestions for job responsibilities and helpful skills. This list is not meant to be all-inclusive, so use it as a starting point and tweak it to fit the needs of your organization. And do not be afraid to split these positions among several people—there is plenty of work to go around! Just remember that you do not need to fill all these positions immediately. Start small and continue to build as your rescue group gains more volunteers. Once your rescue group is established, it is certainly appropriate to pay staff according to the laws of your state. Organizations that have paid staff find that it leads to less turnover and more consistent policies and procedures.

» EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This person is the face of your organization and chosen by the board of directors. In addition to being the rescue group's spokesperson, this individual is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the organization and interacts with the board of directors as well as the other staff members and volunteers. The executive director ensures that the organization is operating according to its mission statement and developing funds and policies for its future. The individual in this position should have business and media savvy as well as a considerable amount of patience and tact.

» RECORDS MANAGER

An obsessively organized and detail-oriented volunteer should fill this post. This individual should be tech savvy as she will be dealing with all paperwork and the [animal management software](#). The records manager will update each animal's profile with current location, medical history, and outcome, as well as update bios and pictures for the group's website and other listings. As your organization grows and the number of animals coming in and out on a weekly basis explodes, this becomes one of the most overwhelming jobs. Find a couple of people to share the work or rotate the responsibilities every couple of months.

» FINANCIAL COORDINATOR

Which one of your friends is an accountant or math whiz? This person might be a good candidate to keep track of the organization's finances, both outgoing expenses and incoming donations. When it comes time to file your 990 tax returns with the IRS, this person will prepare the information for your group's accountant. If someone in your rescue group or community is an accountant, ask if he will donate his services come tax time. If you do not have this type of contact, seek help from a professional. If your rescue group has its 501(c)(3) status, you can inquire about receiving a reduced rate.

» CORPORATE RELATIONS COORDINATOR

You need someone who can reach out to corporations, such as pet stores or big box chains, and other service providers to negotiate prices for food, veterinary services, transport, and other items to allow your rescue to minimize expenses.

» FACILITY DIRECTOR

Are you going to have a brick-and-mortar facility to house some or all of your animals? Or even a few cages in a storefront? If so, you will need someone to run each facility. Preferably, this person will live close to the facility because she will have to be at the location on a frequent basis, including during emergency situations. The facility director will create protocols to care for the animals and ensure their well-being, as well as train, schedule and supervise volunteers. This position is ideal for someone with community outreach experience who can turn a job cleaning cages into a fun task in which volunteers feel invested. Good people skills are also a must as this person will be the face of the organization at that facility. Prior animal care experience and knowledge of shelter cleaning protocols are essential. It is critical to have someone on staff who knows how to handle unvaccinated animals, puppies with parvovirus, kittens with panleukopenia, proper cleaning solutions and ratios and a host of other common issues prevalent in animals that come from a shelter. This person should also be familiar with [The Association of Shelter Veterinarians' Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#), which outlines best practices for running an animal facility, and understand how to implement these standards. When setting up your own facility, be sure to look into local kennel or zoning ordinances at the outset. Many other issues will have to be considered as well, such as how to fund the facility and deal with challenges such as neighbors who may oppose your group's presence.

» FOSTER COORDINATOR

This position requires someone with a lot of patience and good people skills. The foster coordinator needs to give prospective foster providers a clear list of what the group will provide and what the foster provider will be responsible for when caring for animals. Importantly, this person needs to be constantly accessible via email and phone to respond to foster providers' questions in a timely manner. Additionally, the foster coordinator will coordinate returns and find a new foster home for pets when necessary. This post might also start a continuing education program designed to keep foster providers learning and engaged. It is essential to build good relationships with foster providers to keep them happy and willing to continue fostering! It is also a good idea to have this person implement a support network (such as a listserv or a group on social media) that enables foster providers to connect with each other.

» ADOPTIONS COORDINATOR/COUNSELOR

The adoptions coordinator position is great for someone who has reasonable email access throughout the day and time to field the many inquiries she is likely to receive. You want someone who would not feel compelled to use rigid rules for adoptions but instead would use general guidelines as set by the board of directors and is comfortable communicating with potential adopters to support the adoption process. This is another position that requires considerable tact, sensitivity and thoughtfulness. This post is a good fit for someone who is a “people person” and understands that customer service is critical to adoption success.

» ADOPTIONS EVENTS COORDINATOR

Who likes to get up early during the weekend? Grab this person to be the events coordinator and have him plan and run weekly adoption events. Responsibilities include showing up every week to set up and break down the events, having the appropriate paperwork on hand and projecting a warm and welcoming appearance to all potential adopters and foster providers who pass by.

» VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

It is a good idea to have a volunteer coordinator on board to manage the various volunteer needs throughout the organization. This person will take all the volunteer inquiries and direct them to the appropriate staff member, as well as handle volunteer orientation and training sessions. This person should be comfortable using social media and other methods to actively recruit volunteers when needed. Because the volunteer coordinator is also responsible for troubleshooting volunteer issues and potentially terminating volunteers who do not work out, choose someone who is just as comfortable having difficult conversations as she is engaging and motivating volunteers. It is also important for the volunteer coordinator to have a general idea of the needs within each area of the organization so she can create or modify shifts when there is an imbalance. For example, if one facility has 50 volunteers to fill 14 shifts, but another location has only 10, the volunteer coordinator can request that some people move to the second location. Because this person will have contact information for all volunteers in the group, she will be a good resource when other immediate needs arise, such as when an animal needs transport to a new home or to the veterinarian. This is also the go-to person when an outside group, such as a local school or business, wants to volunteer for a day.

» MEDICAL COORDINATOR

This person is responsible for scheduling veterinarian appointments and working as a liaison between the rescue group and any veterinarians the organization works with. It is confusing and wasteful to allow everyone from the rescue to contact the veterinarian when an animal has a medical issue. It will make everyone's life easier if only one or two people from a rescue group are allowed to approve veterinarian appointments. Putting approved veterinarian services in writing and faxing/emailing the authorization to the veterinarian before an appointment can reduce confusion and make the experience better for foster providers and veterinarians. Many veterinarians appreciate the clarity this process provides and it can also make it easier to cross-reference invoices with billing statements down the line. The only caution is that the medical coordinator should have constant access to email and phone, otherwise there may be problems scheduling and approving emergency appointments. Because medical situations can be unexpected and urgent, it is crucial to identify someone as the back-up for this position. The medical coordinator should have a general knowledge of common animal health problems so he can readily determine when it is necessary for an animal to see the veterinarian. This person should also establish protocols for certain situations. For example, if there is an emergency and a foster parent takes his foster animal to the veterinarian without getting prior approval from the medical coordinator, who would be responsible for the bill?

» BEHAVIOR AND TRAINING SPECIALIST

This should be someone the organization has on-call (whether on staff or not) to assist animals in your rescue with behavior issues, as well as pets and pet owners struggling with behavior problems at home (as a means of surrender prevention). The individual should have experience in humane training techniques. It is helpful to have standard operating procedures already drafted for common behavior issues that occur with your rescue animals. The person in this position should work closely with the volunteer, foster and adoption coordinators to help avoid problems before they start. Reaching out to local dog training facilities is an option as well, as many times they are happy to provide ongoing training for fosters.

It is important to work with trainers and behavior experts, but they are not always easy to find. The following resources may be helpful in finding a good partner for your organization:

apdt.com
ccpdt.org

avsabonline.org/resources/find-consult
dacvb.org/about/member-directory



» COMMUNICATIONS/MARKETING/PUBLICITY

Someone with excellent communication skills, social media savvy and webpage design experience is perfect for this job. This is also a great opportunity for someone who enjoys planning fundraising events or someone who wants to help but is not able to volunteer on a regular basis. Be careful in your choice—whichever represents you on social media will be considered the face of your organization. If you would not trust the person to give an interview to the media, she is probably not the best person to manage your organization’s online presence. You will also want a back-up administrator, someone else who has access to your social media channels, in case you lose the main volunteer.

» GRANT WRITING COORDINATOR

Notice the word “coordinator” on this one. It is not reasonable to expect one person to write all the grant proposals for your rescue, but it is helpful to have someone who can search through the resources to find applicable grants and form a team of people to draft the proposals. The coordinator keeps track of grant applications in progress, proposal deadlines, proposal specifications and eventual outcomes.

» FUNDRAISING EVENTS COORDINATOR

A fundraising team is necessary to help offset the organization’s expenses. Tasked with leading your rescue’s fundraising efforts, the individual in this position should have experience in event planning and should organize several different types of events throughout the year.

There are countless other positions your organization can create to make the rescue group run smoothly. Think about the goals and needs of your organization and plan accordingly. And remember, nothing is set in stone—you have the flexibility to adjust positions and responsibilities to make them work for you. Once you have your team in place, create an organizational chart so that it is clear to all staff and volunteers who is in charge of each area within your rescue group.



Having a photographer on staff (either a volunteer at your organization or someone in your community willing to donate time) is key. A good picture can make all the difference in getting an animal adopted.



BUILDING A VOLUNTEER NETWORK

Volunteers are a crucial part of any rescue group—you cannot run an organization without them. From taking care of animals, to running adoption events, to transporting animals, to creating pet bios and taking pictures, there are countless opportunities for volunteers to help your rescue. Having a structured program in place is essential to recruiting and retaining volunteers. Providing training, guidelines and support for volunteers will help prevent frequent turnover.

In creating your volunteer program, think about your organization's specific needs and the characteristics of your ideal volunteer. Then ask for just that in your position description. Also think about what the volunteers are going to get out of the experience. When crafting a position description, consider elements such as the purpose of the job, work involved, training required, learning opportunities offered, commitment needed, level of difficulty involved, skills necessary and type of environment expected. You should also consider listing the physical, mental and emotional requirements. At the same time, do not make your program so rigid and demanding that it discourages or excludes people who want to volunteer on a somewhat limited basis. Make room for everyone.

Communication is essential when it comes to running a successful volunteer program. What are your expectations of volunteers and how can they provide feedback to you? Asking for a minimum time commitment (three months is usually a good length of time) provides consistency for everyone involved and gives the volunteer an out if the experience ends up not being right for them.

It is important to hold an orientation and training session before you allow volunteers to roll up their sleeves and dig in. Try to hold orientations and trainings on a regular basis so that you do not lose someone interested in volunteering because the next orientation is too far in the future. The orientation should provide an overview of the organization, details about what is expected of volunteers and additional information that will help people decide whether or not to participate. The training session should cover all relevant rules, policies and procedures, as well as detailed information people need to accomplish their specific tasks. Handing out a volunteer manual that summarizes everything you went over in the orientation and training is a good practice. You should also create “how to” guidelines for every task volunteers are asked to do at your rescue. Even better, supplement the manual with pictures and keep it easily accessible. This will help volunteers and create consistency within the organization. The training session is also a good opportunity to collect a liability waiver from all volunteers (you should also obtain liability insurance, which is discussed in the next section). If you hold events at pet stores and other locations that you do not own, make sure you check for any age requirements before taking on volunteers under 18 years old.

Do not forget to show your volunteers the fruits of their labor. Let people know on a regular basis which animals have been adopted and share a success story along with pictures. Seeing the happy pets in their new homes or learning that 20 animals were adopted in one weekend is often the most fulfilling part of volunteering for a rescue group.

As volunteers get more engaged, they may also want to try new things. Take their offers of help seriously and, if possible, give them room to try new things that could benefit your group. It may be that their suggestions are not feasible. If this is the case, do not simply say “no,” but explain the reasoning and offer alternatives. This increases their buy-in and interest in the group, and can help retain those who are truly interested in helping long-term.

For more information, including [sample job descriptions and handbooks](#) , check out the Rescue Central resources on [effective volunteer programs](#) .



OBTAINING INSURANCE

Every rescue group should carry insurance to protect the organization, its individual board and staff members and its volunteers.

General liability insurance is important to carry as it will cover claims for bodily injury or property damage to people not associated with your organization. This ensures that your organization is covered if, depending on the policy, a customer falls on a wet floor during an adoption event, a volunteer transporting a pet to its new home has a car accident and injures the other driver, or a cat bites a potential adopter. Additionally, you need to purchase workman's compensation if your organization has paid staff, and possibly property insurance if your rescue has its own facility. You can also buy insurance to cover medical costs for your volunteers and fosters who are injured while performing tasks for your organization.

Although forming a corporate entity protects individuals from personal liability for any corporate wrongdoing, directors and officers of a board can still be personally sued for reasons such as misuse of company funds, fraud, violating the law, gross negligence and neglect of legal and financial duties. As such, it is a good idea to purchase director and officer (often called "D&O") liability insurance to protect corporate directors and officers in the event of a lawsuit. This type of insurance usually covers legal fees, settlements and other costs. Sometimes the D&O insurance will also protect a corporation if it is named as a defendant in a lawsuit.

For more information, check out the Rescue Central resources on [Risk Management](#).

CREATING A BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN

As a tax-exempt organization, you are required to stay in good standing with the IRS. This means annually filing a 990, 990-EZ or 990-N tax return with the IRS, in addition to fulfilling any local and state requirements. Engaging in good accounting practices from the beginning will help you stay organized and focused. An essential step toward this goal is creating a budget for your organization. Developing a budget will require you to thoughtfully estimate costs for the year for items such as food, veterinary care and insurance, and it will help you plan fundraisers to support your efforts.

Running a rescue is a legitimate nonprofit endeavor and should be treated as such to ensure that the organization will be there for the long haul. Creating a business plan will help you think about building a sustainable future for your rescue group by outlining your missions, forecasting budgets, making priorities and setting strategic goals. You may want to consult a financial advisor to get started on the right foot. From the beginning, you need to think about where you want your organization to be in six months, one year and five years down the road. Think of the business plan as a road-map to keeping the organization on track, achieving your goals and fulfilling your mission. Strategically planning for your rescue group will help ensure that your organization is around to help animals for many years to come.

You can find a sample business plan in [Appendix A](#) and a sample budget in [Appendix B](#).

FUNDING YOUR ORGANIZATION

Funding a rescue organization requires some basic business skills in marketing, fundraising, grant writing and cost containment. Plan to set aside \$5,000 to \$10,000 for start-up costs for your rescue group. This should cover start-up items such as food, bowls, toys, blankets, cages, carriers, collars, leashes, litter boxes, litter and veterinary funds for your first few charges. Even if you run a foster-based organization and ask foster providers to cover the daily cost of food, it is a good idea to have back-up items on hand.

Once your organization is established, it is important to have a reliable and constant source of income. Without a solid plan in place, your rescue group will not be sustainable.

TYPES OF FUNDS TO HAVE

Good accounting practices require that you keep track of how donated funds are spent. It is helpful to have several funds to which people can donate to help you care for the animals.

General fund

The majority of your donations will fall into this category and any funds that are not otherwise earmarked will go here. You can use this money for anything needed to run your rescue, such as veterinarian bills, pet food, utility costs, animal transport and staff salaries. Having a “donate here” button on your webpage will help with fundraising for general funds.

Spay/neuter and general veterinary expenses

You will always need more funding for spay/neuter as well as veterinary care. Make it easy for people to donate for those causes by letting them know that you are trying to build funds in these areas.

Specific medical cases

Promoting specific animals with special needs is a great way to pay for unusually expensive cases. Be careful to ensure that all funds designated for a particular animal are used for that animal only. All extra funds must be returned to donors and not used for other animals. Make sure you are upfront and clear to potential donors about where and how the funds will be spent so they do not feel misled.

CREATING A DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Do not rely on adoption fees as your sole source of income. Between spay/neuter, vaccinations and veterinary fees, many times the adoption fee will not even cover the amount of money you have to put into an animal before it can be adopted. While adoption fees are a way to defray some of these costs, you will need to develop a plan that brings money into your organization on an ongoing basis.

A rescue group based in Arlington, Va., exemplifies how an organization can diversify its funding base. While some of its revenue comes from adoption fees, the bulk of revenue comes from donations, fundraising events and partnerships with its for-profit subsidiary businesses—two pet boutiques and a full-service pet care company. Another organization in Chicago, Ill., uses the proceeds of their boarding and training center to fund their nonprofit rescue group. While these specific models may not be feasible for your organization, the lesson is clear: Diversify your funding base and do not count on adoption fees to cover all your costs.

Creating a development plan will provide a path for your organization to grow and focus on long-term goals. It will also enable you to determine which fundraising efforts work and where you should concentrate your energy. Importantly, it will help ensure your organization is there for the long haul.

[Sample development plans](#) may be helpful.

Marketing and branding

Marketing and branding are essential for highlighting your organization and attracting more donors, volunteers and adopters. Do not be intimidated; marketing is simply using strategies and tactics that help you build relationships with supporters and fulfill your mission. Creating a marketing plan on an annual basis is an effective tool to help you achieve your goals as it creates a unified vision for everyone in the organization and guides decisions about resource allocation.

There are numerous ways to market your organization. Start a newsletter or fundraising appeal letter (either printed or electronic) highlighting all the wonderful animals your organization has rescued. People are more likely to give when they are proactively asked to donate. There are simple and inexpensive programs available to help you create a newsletter without the help of a graphic designer. And remember, people want to hear about the great work your group does for animals. You are the voice for the animals in your care, so tell their stories.

Another way to advertise your rescue group is to start a branding campaign—create a logo and put it on t-shirts, bags and other items to sell. There are numerous companies that will do this for your organization at little or no cost. Once you do create a logo and finalize your organization's name, protect your brand by purchasing all website domains with that name (including both .org and .com suffixes), apply for a copyright for your name and apply for a trademark for your logo. You can find information on how to apply on the [United States Patent and Trademark Office's website](#). It is possible to fill out the applications yourself, but you may want to hire an attorney to ensure it is done properly.

Fundraising

Fundraising efforts need to be given the same, if not more, attention as your efforts to save animals' lives. In general, if your organization is unable to raise sufficient funds to pay for its work, it is unlikely that you will be able to raise those funds at a later time. More importantly, attempting to raise funds after you have obligated your rescue group to specific projects is not a sustainable way to run your organization and makes it unlikely that the group will last for too long.

Fundraising activities are regulated by [state law](#). The majority of states require nonprofits that solicit donations from within that state to [register](#) with its governing body. Each state has different registration requirements, so make sure you have submitted the correct paperwork and registered in every state you are soliciting donations. You may want to consult an attorney familiar with fundraising regulations to ensure full compliance.

Fundraising should not be the responsibility of just one person. Create a committee charged with developing creative ways to bring in more funds to your organization, as well as planning and running fundraising events.

There are a whole host of ways you can fundraise for your organization: cultivate donors, establish membership tiers, offer animal sponsorships, create "in honor of" and "*in memoriam*" funds, sell plaques for adoption event cages, post a wish list, develop a planned giving program, encourage in-kind donations, pursue corporate sponsorships, send direct mailings plan fun and creative events—the list is endless.

When planning an event, consider how many volunteers you will need, how much time it will take to plan, how you can advertise the event, how much money you



have to spend on the event, how much money you plan to raise from the event and how you can measure success. Note that it is not always about how much money you raise—sometimes the exposure you gain is even more valuable.

Many times, all you need to do to secure a donation is ask—so do not be shy! A rescue group in New York, N.Y., once reached out to a cat litter company requesting a donation for their nonprofit organization. The company's response? They sent 180 eight-pound bags of litter at no cost.

This brings up another important point: Do not forget about in-kind donations, which are contributions of goods or services. Many organizations prefer to contribute in-kind donations, which can be just as valuable as cash donations.

Send thank you emails for every donation, whether cash or in-kind, and reserve thank you letters in the mail for larger donations. It is crucial to include [specific](#)

Always send a thank-you note to your donors, even if they only give a small amount. People appreciate the personal contact, and if you can give an example of how the funds were used (e.g., picture of a dog toy or cat bed) it helps cement the connection.



[information](#) in thank you notes so that donors can receive [tax deductions](#) for their contributions.

Grant writing

This is another area where you should build a dedicated team. Recruit people who are highly organized, know the organization well and are good writers. The grant writing process is not as overwhelming as people often fear, and once your writers have a couple of proposals under their belt, they will feel more confident and comfortable with the process. The HSUS has a comprehensive [list of grants](#) and [The Foundation Center](#) is another great resource to look for more traditional sources of grant funding. Grant writing is about building relationships, knowing your organization and simply following directions.

Cost Containment

To be a good steward of your donor's funds, you need to get the most bang for the buck. There are some well-known strategies such as buying in bulk, but there are also lesser known ways to save funds for your rescue group. For example, ask [rescue-friendly stores](#) for discounts, contact local grocery stores for ripped bags of food or dented cans they can no longer use, set up an *amazon.com* wish list for supplies, check your city and county for surplus equipment sales, and talk to your local hospital about donating infant eye medication and used medical equipment for use pursuant to your veterinarian's instructions.

For more information on all these topics, check out the Rescue Central resources on [Funding](#).

IMPLEMENTING A CULTURE OF RESPECT

Animal rescue is among the most difficult work out there. Every day we witness some of the very worst of human behavior and it breaks our hearts. But we also work with some of the most caring and passionate individuals who are dedicated to saving as many lives as possible. While we spend so many resources caring for the animals, we often forget to care for ourselves as well as the thousands of other people in the animal welfare community.

The homeless animal issue is a problem bigger than any one organization can solve. Only through a comprehensive and collaborative approach will we be able to decrease

intake at shelters and rescue groups (through such initiatives as bolstering spay/neuter and vaccination clinics, implementing TNR, increasing pet retention and shutting down puppy mills) and increase the live release rate (by increasing adoptions, expanding foster networks and increasing transfer rates between shelters and rescue groups), thereby ensuring humane care for each and every homeless pet. No single organization can do it alone and we have a responsibility to foster a culture of respect within our own organizations and extend it to others.

ENGAGING IN HUMANE DISCOURSE

In the animal rescue community, we all know there is no one way to rescue animals. There are over 10,000 rescue groups in the U.S. and Canada and each organization has a different and valid way of running its program. The animal welfare world is known for being divisive and we are never going to solve the problem of animal homelessness if we do not stop fighting each other and start working together. We need to recognize that not all communities can transform overnight and that it truly takes a village to save homeless animals.

Humane discourse is not about stifling criticism nor is it meant to excuse unacceptable practices. Instead, it is about finding appropriate ways to increase dialogue between different organizations and using suitable outlets for discussing differences. Set aside time in your next staff meeting to discuss issues of concern instead of posting your latest frustration on social media outlets or discussing it during an adoption event. Also think about the impact of the language you choose. For example, are you rescuing an animal from a shelter or with a shelter? How can changing that one word impact your relationships? We all lead by example and when others see us always speaking positively and bringing up issues in an appropriate manner, they will follow suit. Language has an impact and when we tear down shelters, we risk tearing down shelter animals as no one will want to adopt from an entity that is considered “bad.” This only serves to create a greater reliance on limited rescue resources and do a disservice to animals in need.

For more information on [Humane Discourse](#), check out the Rescue Central resources on [Coalition Building](#).

PREVENTING COMPASSION FATIGUE

Between the seemingly endless flow of homeless animals and the abuse and cruelty we see on a daily basis, it is easy to become overwhelmed with compassion fatigue, also known as secondary post-traumatic stress disorder. Some signs of compassion fatigue are negativity, lack of accountability, high turnover, long-lasting illnesses that never seem to resolve, infighting, resistance to change, feeling powerless, feeling apathetic about work and feeling trapped. Oftentimes this stems from the sadness and guilt that arises from not being able to save every animal coupled with pent-up frustration from dealing with careless people.

Make sure you take care of yourself and let others in your organization know if you need a break—they will understand because they may be going through the same thing. Look after your fellow rescuers. If you ignore the signs of compassion fatigue, the effects of negative stress will trickle into the overall morale of the organization and people will burn out. It will likely happen to everyone in the field at some point, so do not be afraid to lean on others and do not try to work through the burnout alone. Learn what your stressors are and create a plan to help yourself deal with them. Taking a short break or getting professional help when you feel the stressors start to get out of hand will allow you to rest and work at your full potential later. This will benefit your colleagues, the organization and the animals in the long run. You cannot help others until you first take care of yourself.

For more information, check out the Rescue Central resources on [Preventing Compassion Fatigue](#).

CUSTOMER SERVICE SKILLS

It can be challenging to keep your cool in this line of work. Between the long list of animals in need, overwhelming veterinarian bills, and the sad stories we deal with on a daily basis, always providing calm and courteous service to infuriating customers can seem impossible. This along with many rescuers claiming that they are not a “people person” can lead to unhappy potential adopters and fewer animals going to a home. While we all started in this business because we love animals, we need people to make the organization work—staff to run the rescue group, volunteers to help, donors to fund, fosters to provide temporary care and adopters to provide animals with loving homes. Good customer service should be the cornerstone of every interaction your organization has with people—whether they are the general public, potential adopters, volunteers, shelter personnel or animal control officers. Every person involved with your rescue group is an ambassador for your organization. Set a good example and ensure that everyone associated with your rescue treats customers and potential customers in a welcoming and non-judgmental way.

Most people are good and treat their animals well. Remember that many will not have the knowledge that you have, so before thinking a question such as “Can you ship a dog to me?” is a red flag, consider that the person may be legitimately unfamiliar with rescue, or that this is his first pet. Keep in mind that if someone comes to your organization wanting to adopt, they are already trying to do the right thing and you do not want to scare them away by treating them with suspicion.

Good customer service is essential to the success of your organization as your reputation is priceless and easily destroyed with one bad encounter. Be accepting of feedback that may not be positive, and take it as a learning experience. Keep an eye on reviews on Yelp and other review sites such as [Great Nonprofits](#), to see what the general sentiment is about your organization and your brand.

One of the most frequent complaints from potential adopters is that they did not receive a response to their inquiry or application. Combat this by setting organizational standards for responding to questions and adoption applications so that, for example, all inquiries receive a reply within 24 hours and all adoption applications—even if it is not approved or the animal is not available—receive a response. Do not miss out on opportunities for an adoption. Make sure your available pet postings are updated frequently to ensure that all listed animals are currently available. It can be frustrating for an adopter to fall in love with a pet online only to find out the pet is not available after all.

A few practical tips for good customer service: Be prompt with responses to inquiries and use a friendly and warm demeanor; provide accurate, current and easily accessible information on your organization and the animals in your care; actively listen and be friendly to the people who approach your rescue group; always remain calm and professional; and say thank you to the people who work with your organization.

For more information, check out the Rescue Central resources on [Customer Service](#).



A close-up photograph of a white rabbit with striking red eyes, sitting in a wire cage. The rabbit is positioned in the lower half of the frame, looking slightly to the left. The cage's metal bars are visible in the background, and the floor is covered with a layer of dry straw. A semi-transparent yellow banner is overlaid on the top half of the image, containing the text 'SECTION 2' and 'ANIMAL CARE STANDARDS'.

SECTION 2

ANIMAL CARE STANDARDS

Regardless of whether your organization houses animals in foster homes, an adoption center, boarding kennels or some other type of facility, you must ensure they receive the highest standards of care.

THE FIVE FREEDOMS

While groups can disagree on specifics (e.g., which brand of food is best, whether harnesses or collars are preferable), there are five fundamental freedoms to which every animal is entitled:

1. FREEDOM FROM HUNGER AND THIRST

All animals need ready access to fresh water and a diet that allows them to maintain full health and vigor. This must be specific to the animal. For example, a puppy, an adult dog, a pregnant cat and a senior cat would all need different types of food provided on different schedules.

2. FREEDOM FROM DISCOMFORT

All animals need an appropriate living environment, including protection from the elements, and a clean, safe and comfortable resting area. Animals must be provided with bedding and not sleep on a cold hard floor. Overcrowding will increase an animal's physical discomfort and should be avoided. Do not forget about temperature and environmental factors, such as noise levels and access to natural light. And if an animal is outside, it must have shelter from the elements as well as appropriate food and water bowls that will not freeze or tip over.

3. FREEDOM FROM PAIN, INJURY OR DISEASE

All animals must be afforded care that prevents illness and injury, and that assures rapid diagnosis and treatment if illness/injury should occur. This entails vaccinating animals, monitoring animals' physical health, rapidly treating any injuries and providing appropriate medications for treatment and pain.

4. FREEDOM TO EXPRESS NORMAL BEHAVIOR

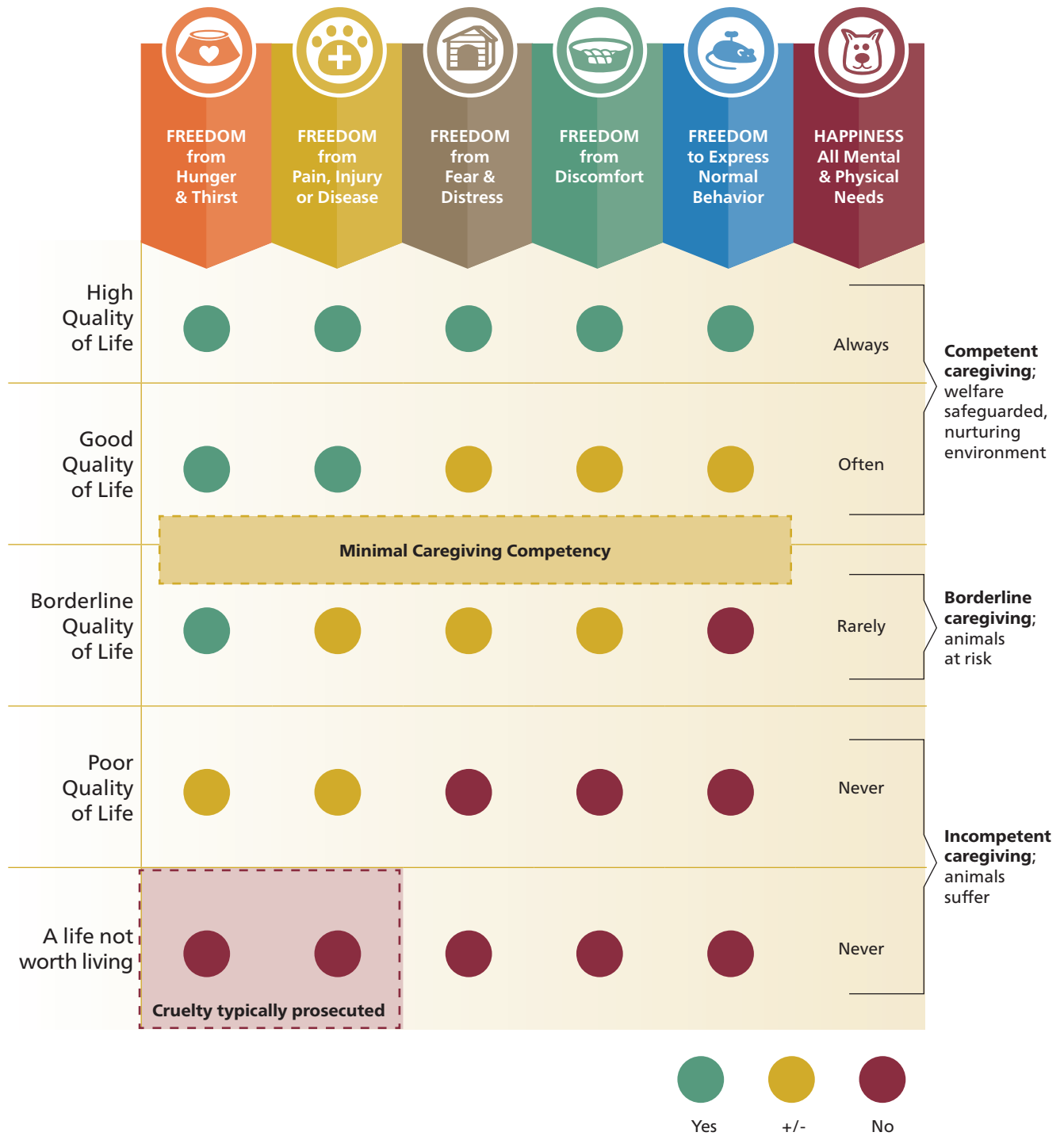
All animals need sufficient space and proper facilities to allow them to move freely and fully, and to engage in the same types of activities as other animals of their species. They also need to be able to interact with—or avoid—others of their own kind as desired. They must be able to stretch every part of their body (from nose to tail), run, jump and play at will. Are you overcrowded? Are you housing too many animals in one room? If so, the animals are probably unable to experience the fourth freedom.

5. FREEDOM FROM FEAR AND DISTRESS

All animals need both a general environment and handling that allows them to avoid mental suffering and stress. The mental health of an animal is just as important as its physical health. Are you providing sufficient enrichment? Allowing the animal to hide in a safe space when needed? Ensuring that there is not too much noise? Are there too many animals in one room? Remember, psychological stress can quickly transition into physical illness.

The Five Freedoms were first articulated by England's Farm Animal Welfare Council, but they apply to every type of animal in every type of setting, including shelters, rescues and even private homes. Most organizations tend to do a good job of providing Freedoms 1, 2 and 3, but 4 and 5, which focus more on an animal's psychological needs, tend to be overlooked. It is important to examine your operations from the perspective of the animals in your care. If each and every animal is not receiving all Five Freedoms, you must reexamine your policies and procedures, and you certainly must not take any new animals into your program until the situation is resolved.

The Association of Shelter Veterinarians' Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters ("ASV GSC"), which despite the title was developed for "traditional brick and mortar shelters, sanctuaries, and home-based foster or rescue networks," are our profession's most useful tool, largely because they are premised on the Five Freedoms. The guidelines should be used as your touch point for answering every question from "Is my animal housing humane?" to "Is my organization trying to care for too many animals?" The operating guidelines below are adapted from the ASV GSC, and



Patronek G. 2010. Adapted from FAWC, 2009

following them is necessary to ensure the Five Freedoms. Note that these are *minimal* considerations, not complete operational plans. We recommend that you read the ASV GSC in its entirety and consult your veterinarian to develop written standards for your organization.

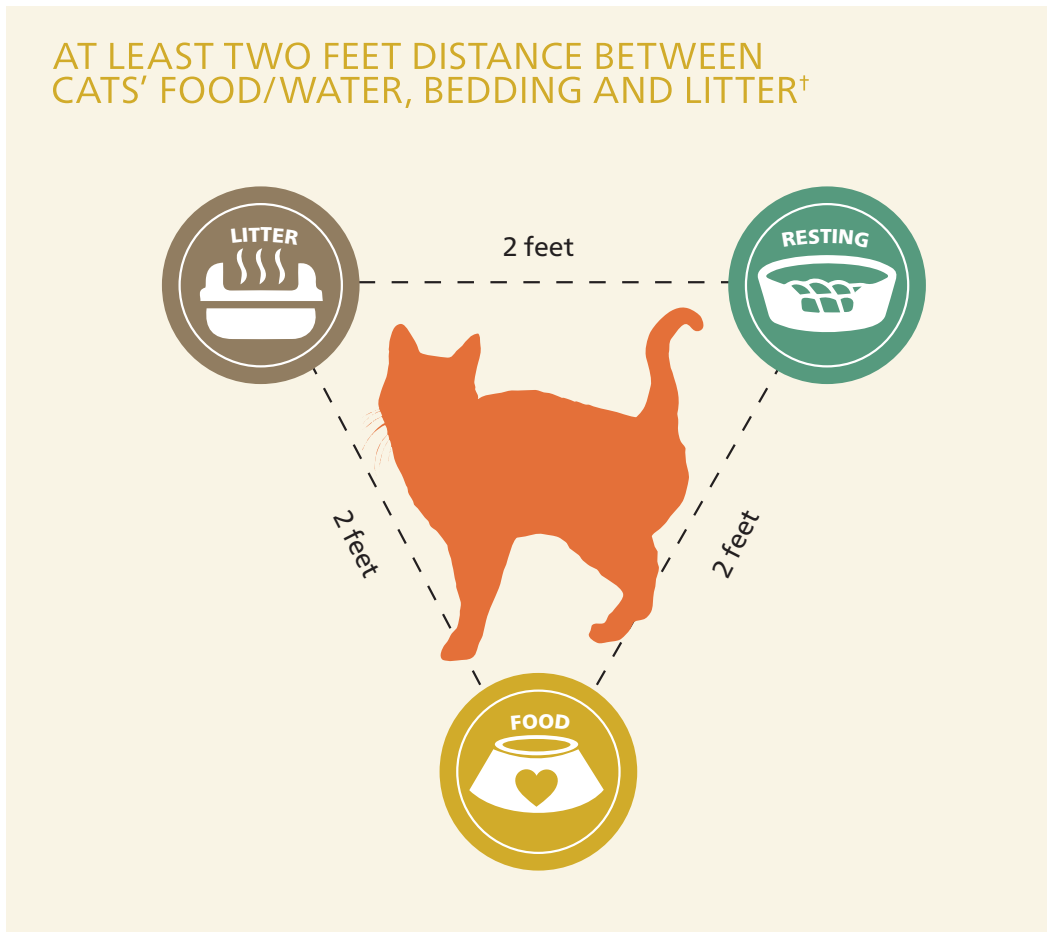
STANDARDS FOR PRIMARY ENCLOSURES

The physical space that will serve as an animal's primary enclosure, the place where he will eat, sleep and spend the majority of his time, must be safe, sanitary, and of sufficient size to provide a humane quality of life. **IMPORTANT:** *Cages, crates, and carriers that are intended for travel or short-term, temporary confinement are unacceptable as primary enclosures; it is also unacceptable to keep animals on wire or slatted flooring.*

Ensuring that an animal has adequate space can be a challenge, particularly when several animals are kept in the same room or when an animal must be confined in a kennel or cage. Regardless of the type of housing used, every animal must be able to:

- ✓ Stand up, sit down and lie down comfortably
- ✓ Stretch fully from tip of front toes to back toes
- ✓ Carry her tail in normal carriage (for cats and certain breeds of dogs that means having tail fully extended)
- ✓ Engage in normal sleeping, eating/drinking and urinating/defecating behaviors (most animals prefer not to eliminate near where they eat and sleep, so allowing sufficient space to distinguish a "potty area" is important)
- ✓ Assume normal posture when sleeping, eating/drinking, and urinating/defecating
- ✓ See out of the enclosure, but also avoid being seen

With respect to dogs, there are no hard and fast rules about kennel dimensions because there is so much variation in size among breeds—what is essentially a palatial kennel for a Chihuahua can be cruelly small for a St. Bernard or Great Dane. Therefore,



when determining the appropriate enclosure for dogs in your care, use the rules of thumb above as your guide. Does each dog have enough room to stand up, sit down, turn around and lie down comfortably? Can the animal establish a potty area sufficiently far away from the eating and sleeping areas (even dogs who are housetrained and walked regularly may have an accident or two, particularly while adjusting to a new routine)? If not, the primary enclosure is not large enough.

For cats kept in cages, it is vital to ensure that their enclosure allows them to hold their tails in normal posture (straight up) and lets them stretch from the tips of their front toes all the way to their back toes. While the ASV GSC states that there must be at least two feet of triangulated distance between cats' food/water, bedding and litter box areas, this is a bare minimum, and they should have as much space as possible. When cats are housed in groups, each requires a minimum of 18 square feet of floor space, and regardless of the size of the room, ASV GSC recommends a maximum of 10–12 cats per room.

† From ASV GSC, p. 8

In addition to size, there are other factors to be considered in determining whether an animal's environment is humane. Inside the enclosure, the animal must have a comfortable place to sleep—typically that means soft towels or bedding materials on a bed or other platform raised off the floor. They should also have toys, particularly those that provide mental as well as physical stimulation. Cats need places to hide, scratching posts, and options for sleeping and perching (they prefer to be off the floor, so vertical space is a must). The longer the animal will stay in your care, the more mentally and physically stimulating her primary housing area must be.

The environment in which the primary enclosure is located is equally important. For instance, the animal must have an appropriate temperature (sled dogs used to living in cold environments will have vastly different temperature needs than newborn kittens or sick animals). The American Veterinary Medical Association (“AVMA”) recommends ambient temperatures between 60–80 degrees, but individual animals may have needs outside that range. Fresh air is important and can help prevent disease. Appropriate lighting is vital—just like people, animals need regular light/dark cycles to support healthy sleep patterns. And while adding music can be soothing and help mask unpleasant sounds like barking and electronic machinery, animals should also have periods of quiet to facilitate rest. Consult your veterinarian for guidance on establishing the appropriate environment for the animals in your care.

Animals' primary housing areas must also be safe and able to be thoroughly sanitized. Ensure that there are no sharp edges on cages and that there are no gaps or spaces where a pet's head or paw might get stuck. If animals will be kept in foster homes, encourage care providers to look around the entire area and remove any breakables, items that they do not want potentially soiled or damaged and items that may be hazardous to a pet (e.g., poisonous houseplants, exposed electrical cords, trash, household cleaners). You may want to encourage foster providers to invest in outlet safety plugs and childproof latches for drawers and cabinets.

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Appropriate health care, including routine and preventative care, should be provided to all animals in your organization's charge. Track and record typical indicators of health like weight, temperature and [body condition score](#), but also pay attention to anything that seems out of the ordinary for the animal, as this may be an indication that something is wrong. Create a list of health issues to look for with your veterinarian, draft a written protocol for foster providers and document any health issues you suspect an animal may have.



To prevent the spread of disease and safeguard the public (including foster homes), immediately isolate any animal showing signs of contagious disease. Have medical contact information readily available for all foster providers in case of an emergency, and provide fosters with clear guidance as to what is considered normal, what symptoms are indicators of illness and what symptoms require immediate veterinary attention.

VACCINATIONS AND PARASITE CONTROL

Ensuring that all animals are appropriately [vaccinated](#) is a critical part of running a safe and humane rescue organization. In addition, animals need protection against parasites (e.g., fleas, heartworm) and zoonotic diseases (diseases that can spread between species, such as ringworm). Consult your veterinarian to determine what vaccinations and medications should be given to the animals on a routine basis.

DISEASE PREVENTION

Remember that animals may arrive with diseases that are difficult to remove from the environment (like ringworm or parvo), so limiting them to places that can be completely and easily disinfected is essential. In shelter settings it is recommended that all surfaces, including walls and floors, be made of non-porous materials so disinfectants like bleach can be easily applied (and remember to always clear all organic material before applying bleach—otherwise the bleach can be deactivated). In foster home situations, that can prove more difficult. Bedding and other materials should be routinely washed with bleach and machine dried to kill any viruses. Creative holding options like children’s baby pools and pet exercise pens can be useful, particularly when managing puppies and kittens. While foster settings are definitely more challenging in terms of thorough sanitation, the risks may be outweighed by the benefits of the stress-reduction achieved by keeping the animal in a home setting. Talk with your veterinarian about the best isolation protocols to follow.

SPAY/NEUTER

Ideally, every animal should be sterilized prior to adoption. Some rescue groups will have an adopter pay an extra deposit that is returned upon proof that the animal has been spayed or neutered. This system does not ensure 100% compliance, and it requires organizations to spend extra time and resources on follow-up. [Pediatric spay/neuter](#) is safe, effective and becoming common practice. All animals that are older than eight weeks, weigh at least two pounds and are healthy should be sterilized prior to adoption. However, do not let strict adherence to this rule undermine a potentially successful adoption. If an animal is too unhealthy for surgery, your group may want to hold off on finalizing the adoption until after she has recovered in her new home and been altered. Get a letter from a veterinarian that details the animal’s condition if the animal will always be too unhealthy for spay/neuter. This is particularly important in areas that have different licensing requirements for altered and unaltered pets.

You may also want to consider creating a spay policy regarding pregnant pets. With so many homeless animals across the country, resource constraints can make it difficult to rescue all the animals in danger while also providing for newborns. This can become a difficult ethical situation and having a policy in place beforehand makes it easier to deal with when it does crop up. While some organizations may feel strongly one way or another, other organizations may feel comfortable with a middle ground—for example, not terminating a pregnancy that is more than halfway through the gestation period.

MICROCHIPPING

According to a study published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*[†], only 22% of lost dogs and fewer than 2% of lost cats that enter shelters are reunited with their families. Those statistics are drastically different for microchipped pets. More than 52% of microchipped dogs and more than 38% of microchipped cats are returned home. However, further research reveals that only 58% of the animals' microchips are registered in a database with the owner's contact information, making nearly half of the chips ineffective in helping pets return home.

Your rescue should ensure that all adopted animals are microchipped and encourage adopters to register and update it with their current contact information and list your organization as the second contact. This way, if the animal becomes lost and the microchip does not have current contact information, your organization will be notified. In addition to microchipping, you should put a collar and an identification tag on all animals, including indoor cats, before they go to their new homes. Animals in foster care and those attending adoption events should also wear collars with identification.

You can find more [tips](#) on how to reunite lost pets with their owners here.

[†] (JAVMA (Vol. 235, No. 2)



FOOD

Just like many people, some animals have specific dietary needs to accommodate issues such as food allergies or a need for weight management. Have a veterinarian assess each animal's dietary needs to provide a proper diet. The following are standards for providing nutritious food and water:

- ✓ Animals should have access to fresh, clean water at all times and it should be changed at least daily.
- ✓ Animals should have access to nutritious food at an amount appropriate for the animal's age, weight and health. Conduct research and talk to your veterinarian to determine the best food for your pets. There are resources that can help you determine [how much food](#) to give your pets as well as [which foods](#) are appropriate.
- ✓ Throw out uneaten food after a maximum of 24 hours.
- ✓ Store food to protect it from spoiling as well as from insects and rodents.

WORKING WITH A VETERINARIAN

Veterinarians are critical partners in helping rescue groups carry out their mission, so it is important to build relationships early on. In addition to having a partner for spay/neuter procedures, many of the animals in your organization will need extensive veterinary care before they can be considered adoptable. Some things you will need a veterinarian for are spay/neuter, general care, emergency care, preventative medications such as flea/tick and heartworm medication, standard and rabies vaccinations as well as implanting microchips. Some rescue groups prefer to work with veterinarians who have experience in shelter medicine as they may be more familiar with the types of issues the animals in their care experience.

While many veterinarians choose their profession because they love animals, they are also business owners and have a bottom line to manage. They have real and legitimate financial concerns, especially in a down economy, and rescue groups need to respect that. Because of these concerns, you may find resistance from some veterinarians who are wary of losing money or have been burned by another rescue group in the



past. Be mindful when approaching them to partner with your organization and aim to build a mutually beneficial and successful relationship. You should be honest and upfront with what you will need from a veterinarian and continue to have an open dialogue along the way.

You should certainly expect veterinarians that you work with to provide the same level of care to your organization's pets as they do to their full-paying clients. Perhaps the veterinarian can only offer you discounted prices if your organization is limited to a certain number of visits per month. That arrangement can work as long as you establish partnerships with other veterinarians as well. Go through services and prices and put your agreement in writing, including names of individuals authorized to approve veterinarian appointments and care. This will help prevent misunderstandings before they occur. And make sure you highlight how working with your organization will be beneficial for the veterinarian's practice by referring adopters. For veterinarians who are just starting out, partnering with a rescue group is a great way to quickly gain experience in a wide array of skills.

MENTAL WELL-BEING

Animal welfare organizations tend to focus their attention on the first three freedoms, ensuring their animals receive proper nutrition, veterinary care and adequate shelter. But the last two freedoms are equally important, and your group must take steps to ensure that each animal's mental well-being receives just as much attention as the physical. Ensuring the mental health of the animals in your rescue's care is just as important as ensuring their physical welfare.

STRESS

Failure to meet Freedoms 4 (freedom to express normal behavior) and 5 (freedom from fear and distress) cause animals to experience stress, and stress translates directly into disease, which can increase veterinarian bills, decrease adoptability and put a strain on your entire organization. Therefore, it is in your best interest to make sure that the animals in your care stay as stress-free as possible.

Even though many animals are stoic, meaning they do not disclose early symptoms of distress or disease, there are behaviors that to the careful observer indicate stress:

- ✓ Urinating/defecating on bedding
- ✓ Extreme overstimulation or fear response at the sight of people or other animals
- ✓ Barrier/kennel aggression
- ✓ Repetitive behaviors (e.g., pacing, spinning, licking)
- ✓ Being shut down, unresponsive, withdrawn or hiding
- ✓ Under- or over-grooming
- ✓ Not eating
- ✓ Cats using the "litter box lounge" (it is not normal for cats to lay in their litter box)
- ✓ Excessive or inappropriate vocalizing (especially loud/ repetitive sounds)

Remember, you need to know what is normal to recognize what is not. If a cat that normally is very vocal suddenly stops “talking,” or if a dog that normally greets people politely in the kennel suddenly starts lunging or barking, those could be indicators of stress. All signs of stress should be addressed immediately, either by adding enrichment to relieve boredom, removing the stressor (e.g., placing the animal in a quieter room) and/or obtaining veterinary attention.

ENRICHMENT

Enrichment is not a “nice extra” for animals awaiting new homes; it is so important that the ASV GSC at p. 34 expressly states that it is not optional:

The purpose of enrichment is to reduce stress and improve well-being by providing physical and mental stimulation, encouraging species-typical behaviors (e.g., chewing for dogs and rodents, scratching for cats), and allowing animals more control over their environment.... Enrichment should be given the same significance as other components of animal care, such as nutrition and veterinary care, and should not be considered optional.

The good news is enrichment does not have to involve a lot of time, expense or expertise.

Easy automatics

There are ways to provide enrichment almost automatically, just by incorporating them into cage/kennel setups and the general environment. Items like hiding boxes for cats, toilet paper rolls for rodents, scratching posts for colony rooms and safe chew toys for dogs, can all be incorporated into your basic cage/kennel setups right along with food and water bowls. Putting up window perches for cats, playing a nature video, or perhaps even installing a fish tank, can be “add-ons” that all residents of a room can find stimulating and enjoy.

Win-wins

Using enrichment techniques to help make cleaning and other processes easier is another way to incorporate enrichment without adding undue burdens. If you hold several dogs in a kennel situation, incorporating [playgroups](#) gets everyone outside for easier cleaning while the dogs exercise and play. Give cats interactive toys to distract them while their cages are spot-cleaned.

In-cage enrichment

For most people, shelter/rescue volunteering and “dog walking” are synonymous, and that is definitely a much needed service for animals living in kennels or cages. But walking alone is not truly enrichment—in fact, it can actually be detrimental. Kennelled dogs often jump and carry on at the front of their cage when people come by—why? Because the only excitement in their day is when a person arrives and takes them out. But kennelled dogs may spend 20+ hours each day inside their kennel, and caged cats usually spend all of their time in that space, so should not that be the place they want to be and feel most comfortable?

It is not difficult to enrich the inside of a kennel/cage for an animal awaiting a new home:

For dogs:

- Stack cereal boxes and smear the innermost box with peanut butter, so the dog has to rip the boxes apart to reach the treat.
- Place their dinner in water and freeze it, so the dog has to lick his kibble out; serve meals in Kongs with kibble on the bottom and wet food on top.
- Fill Kongs with peanut butter, or better yet, freeze the stuffed Kongs (Kong has a program where shelters and rescues can get free or low cost unsaleable “seconds.”).
- Blow nontoxic bubbles throughout the room and let the dogs try to catch them.
- Read or do paperwork while sitting in the kennel.

For cats:

- Add objects like caps, paper bags, tissue paper or empty boxes to cages.
- Place treats in tin foil and ball it up, so the cat can not only bat it around but also work to open it and find the goodies.
- Grow fresh cat grass or catnip.
- Groom cats inside their cages.
- Put catnip inside socks or strips of fleece and knot them.
- Stuff tuna or other treats inside an old toilet paper tube, then plug the tube with tissue paper as an extra obstacle for the cat to remove.
- Put strips of carpet or scratching posts inside the cage.
- Feed wet food in half of a plastic “Easter” egg to make the cats work to get the food out.

Enrichment does not have to be fancy or expensive. The key is to be creative and give animals activities and toys that not only prompt physical stimulation, but also engage their brains and require them to problem solve.



Out-of-cage enrichment

Enrichments that provide both mental and physical stimulation should also be provided outside of the animal's cage/kennel. Dog walks, for example, are often either just a quick potty break or a long hike designed to tire the dog out physically. Both opportunities are important, but how often do dogs catch on and take longer and longer to potty, knowing that once they do they will immediately have to go back inside? And while long hikes are exhausting, they are also physically conditioning the dog to need longer and harder workouts to achieve the same results. Trips outside the kennel should not be just for exercise, they should provide opportunities to engage the animal's brain. Reinforcing polite walking manners, for example, or using clicker training to teach a new skill not only engages the mind, it helps increase the dog's adoptability. And it does not have to be all work—creating scent trails for dogs to follow, or letting them dig for treats in sandboxes or wading pools, allows them to expend energy and use their senses.

You can also engage cats both physically and mentally. Believe it or not, cats can be clicker trained just as easily as dogs! And there is an added benefit to engaging cats—research shows that people are most likely to adopt a cat that engages with them and initiates a physical connection. Thus, encouraging cats to approach people and even teaching them to politely paw at passersby can be lifesaving!

Other stress relievers

For animals whose stress is not relieved by enrichment alone, there are other techniques you can use. Sometimes just changing their location can make all the difference. If an animal needs a quieter space, moving him away from sources of noise and stress can help; conversely, for the dog that needs lots of stimulation, putting her in a kennel right in the center of the action can do the trick. Some groups swear by products like Feliway and Comfort Zone, which simulate natural calming pheromones. Thundershirts are available for both cats and dogs to help relieve anxiety, and music and techniques like Tellington Touch (TTouch) and Reiki can be used to calm anxious animals. Medications are viewed by many as a last resort, but an argument can be made that animals are better off being successfully medicated before their stress behaviors become lasting bad habits. Talk with your veterinarian about options and protocols.

SOCIALIZATION

Not too long ago, fosters were warned to keep foster pets far away from their own pets and children to avoid spreading disease. Puppies, in particular, were to be kept isolated until they had their full series of vaccinations. Nowadays, we know that the benefits of proper socialization far outweigh the risks to anyone involved. Of course it is vital to ensure that all pets are properly vaccinated and that all interactions are closely monitored, but helping to ensure that foster pets are well acclimated to all types of animals, people and environments is a critical component of preparing them for successful adoption.

VETERINARY POLICY

It is important to have a policy in place, approved by the board of directors, regarding veterinary care. This policy should include instructions to the executive director on various aspects of veterinary care so that the director does not have to ask the board for permission every time the organization seeks medical attention for an animal in need. The policy should cover issues such as how much the organization can spend on an animal without board approval, what conditions will be treated under what circumstances and what health situations require board approval prior to treatment. It is critical to have a protocol in place so that a rescue group does not overextend its resources and jeopardize the entire organization by addressing more medical issues than it can handle.

EUTHANASIA POLICY

There are times when the only humane option for an animal is euthanasia. The issue of euthanasia in rescue groups generally arises when an animal is suffering (physically or mentally) and the organization does not have the resources or ability to stop or ease the suffering.

The decision to euthanize is never easy, but you can find guidance within the [Five Freedoms](#). While euthanasia philosophy may differ between individual organizations, policy should always ensure that an animal receives all Five Freedoms through the end of life. Once an animal's quality of life has deteriorated to the point where freedom from discomfort and pain (physical and mental) is no longer possible, euthanasia becomes the humane option.

Drafting a clear euthanasia policy and having it approved by the board of directors will allow you to create a policy that adheres to the values of the organization. It will also help your rescue group maintain consistency and avoid problems down the road. You can find a sample euthanasia policy in [Appendix C](#).

All euthanasia must be conducted humanely by a veterinarian or certified euthanasia technician who administers an injection of sodium pentobarbital (a tranquilizer is not required, but may be appropriate), and the animal must be made comfortable throughout the procedure.



SECTION 3

OPERATIONAL STANDARDS



Having strong day-to-day operations will help ensure that the animals in your rescue group's care receive all **Five Freedoms**. It will also get your animals into permanent homes faster, enabling your organization to save even more lives.

RECORDKEEPING

Good recordkeeping is crucial for the operation and growth of a rescue group. Having the ability to review what you have done in the past is the best way to make adjustments and plan where to concentrate your resources in the future. If you are not getting enough adopters or are receiving too many returns, perhaps it is time to change your adoption procedure and policies. Noticing a trend that you have a dip in intake in December but an overload in May? Start shifting your marketing efforts and promotions to get as many animals as possible adopted by April. Is that foster provider really trying to adopt out her charges or is this animal that is taking a year to place a particularly difficult case? Are you taking in more animals with severe medical issues than you realize? Is there a particular type of animal that you are having difficulty adopting out? Are there common reasons why people are returning pets? You will not have this valuable information without keeping good records. Moreover, keeping good records is crucial when applying for grants because funders want to know about your organization through data and demonstrated outcomes and grant reporting will also likely require this type of information.

What types of records should you keep? For the animals in your care, keep records of their name; microchip number; species; physical description (e.g., breed, color, identifying marks); age; gender; source; medical history including sterilization, rabies certificate and vaccine history; behavior issues; location within your organization; adoption applications and contracts; outcomes (e.g., fostered, adopted, returned); and a full body, side and close-up facial photograph. Monthly adoption reports will help you determine adoption trends as well as pinpoint why some animals are returned. Once you know why people are returning pets, it will be much easier to devise solutions to stop returns for common reasons.

Software will help you track the number of foster providers in your network along with the average length of time animals stay in foster care until they are adopted. You can also determine if you are taking in too many severe medical or behavioral cases, as well as the average amount spent per animal. All of these statistics can help you plan your fundraising efforts and convince your board when it is time to change course.

It is also important to maintain up-to-date records on your volunteers, foster providers and donors. Having current contact information on file will make communication quicker and easier when you want to send out a call-to-action such as finding a foster for an animal in need or asking people to attend a fundraiser. And keeping notes on which foster providers can handle specific types of medical or behavioral issues will make it that much easier to make good matches.

It is also essential to keep track of your funds—where they are coming from and where they are going. This will help you plan your budget, as well as determine where you spend the majority of your funds and where you can cut costs.

You can find more information on data collection at shelteranimalscount.org. There are also many [software programs](#) available that will help you track the different types of data. Join the Rescue Central [forum](#) to ask other rescuers for advice on which software program might best fit your organization's needs.

TRANSPARENCY

Transparency is essential for building trust, both with the public and other shelter and rescue partners. Keeping records and providing them upon request, or even posting them on your website, is one way to show potential adopters and partners that you manage a professional and well-run organization. Rescue groups should readily share information about their operations, experience and the animals in their care. They should also always be up front about how donors' funds are used and the impact they



make, an animal's outcome, policies and procedures for adopting and fostering and all statistics, such as the number of animals in the organization's care. Transparency also means allowing people to visit your facility (if you have one) or the foster homes where your animals reside (unless personal safety is an issue). Make it easy for people to contact your organization by providing current contact information on your website and responding to inquiries promptly.

DETERMINING CAPACITY

According to [humane care standards](#), it takes approximately 15 minutes per day to provide basic care for each animal in a shelter environment (to clean the living environment and provide daily nutrition). So, for example, if you have one hour per day to care for the animals, that means you have the capacity to care for four animals, including your own pets. You can use the [UC Davis Virtual Consultant](#) to assess whether your housing for animals is adequate to ensure humane care.

If you provide more than minimum care, for example, enrichment, grooming, monitoring health and behavior and showing the pet to potential adopters, you need to spend even more time caring for each animal. Another way of determining whether the correct capacity has been calculated is whether all animals are being provided with [The Five Freedoms](#).

Rescue groups often have a variety of types of temporary homes for their animals—from brick and mortar facilities to cages at pet stores to foster homes. The correct capacity, still using [The Five Freedoms](#) as a guide, should be calculated for each of these different types of environments to ensure that an organization is not exceeding capacity and putting their charges at risk of inhumane treatment.

The foster coordinator or another staff member needs to ensure that foster providers are not overwhelmed with the number of animals they take in and that all animals in the home are receiving humane care. One way to implement this is for the foster coordinator to have ongoing discussions with each foster provider to determine capacity (the upper limit of animals that should be kept in that home) based on pre-determined factors (e.g., space, time the foster provider spends at home, potential for creating an isolation room, the foster provider's own pets), while also taking into account the needs of the foster pet. For example, special medical treatment or behavior modification will reduce the foster provider's overall capacity to care for additional animals, while a mother and her babies can be considered just one animal if the babies do not need specialized care. You can also ask foster providers to send a health and behavior report on a regular basis and require them to attend at least one adoption event per month so an organization can keep an eye on the animals. It is important not to set a capacity number in stone, but to use it as a starting point and allow room to adjust for the specific and evolving situation of each foster home.

In determining capacity, it is essential that all animals have sufficient space in their primary enclosure, whether it is a cage or a home. According to the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' *Guidelines for Standards of care in Animal Shelters* at p. 7:

Primary enclosures must provide sufficient space to allow each animal, regardless of species, to make normal postural adjustments, e.g., to turn freely and to easily stand, sit, stretch, move their head, without touching the top of the enclosure, lie in a comfortable position with limbs extended, move about and assume a comfortable posture for feeding, drinking, urinating and defecating. In addition, cats and dogs should be able to hold their tails erect when in a normal standing position. Primary enclosures should allow animals to see out but should also provide at least some opportunity to avoid visual contact with other animals. Tethering is an unacceptable method of confinement for any animal and has no place in [humane sheltering](#).

Crates should never be the permanent residence for an animal. That being said, whenever an animal is in a crate (whether for transport, an adoption event, crate training or any other reason), it should be large enough for the animal to lie down,

sit and stand in a natural position. Animals should not share a crate unless it is a female with offspring or when there is a behavioral benefit. Even then, such confinement is acceptable only if the crate size allows the above criteria to be met without the animals having to lie on top of each other.

For more information, check out the Rescue Central resources on [calculating capacity](#).

EXCEEDING CAPACITY

There are constantly reports of rescue groups that have had their animals confiscated and charged with cruelty. Being overcapacity is especially heartbreaking because often the people involved started out with the best intentions, but eventually took in more animals than they could humanely care for and became overwhelmed. Until we cure the root problems of animal overpopulation, there will be a never-ending source of animals that need our help. It is so easy to take in more animals than your organization truly has capacity for. The truth is, however, when a rescue group exceeds its capacity for humane care, whether or not it is intentional, it can ruin the lives of both the animals and people involved. Being overcapacity is considered a form of animal cruelty because it inflicts widespread suffering over a long duration of time. Learning the signs of exceeding capacity and reporting someone you suspect to the proper authorities will prevent animal abuse and save an organization that is going down the wrong path.

In extreme cases, animal hoarding is defined as having more pets than one can provide humane care for; failing to provide minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation, shelter and veterinary care; denying both the inability to provide basic care and the impact that failure has on the animals and people in the household; and continuing to accumulate more animals. Hoarding is less about the number of animals a person has in her possession and more about the quality of care provided to each one.

Many times, the continued accumulation of animals occurs because the individual wrongly thinks that only she can provide adequate care for them. In many cases, the person really does care about the animals and tries to provide for them. The typical profile of a rescuer who has exceeded capacity is someone who is preoccupied with animals, believes she has special abilities to communicate with them, spends most of her time and funds on the animals and tends to be socially isolated, having little contact with others besides a veterinarian.

Signs that a rescuer may be overcapacity[†] include:

- ✓ Accepting more animals into the organization than are adopted out
- ✓ Having many animals with a poor external appearance
- ✓ Keeping many un- or under-socialized animals
- ✓ Maintaining impossible adoption standards because no one else is “good enough” to care for the animals
- ✓ Facing widespread disease that is usually only present in overcrowding situations (e.g., URI, parasites, kennel cough, FeLV)
- ✓ Taking animals to the veterinarian only once, even when follow-up care is needed
- ✓ Refusing to euthanize animals whose physical health is compromised to the point that they no longer have a good quality of life
- ✓ Keeping bodies of animals that have passed

If you suspect that someone in your organization or elsewhere is exceeding capacity, what should you do? If it is both possible and safe, you should try to visit the person’s home and see for yourself if the animals are in danger. Convey your concerns to the director of the rescue group or members of the board of directors. If that is not possible, you can talk to your local animal control agency or shelter, public health department, mental health department, adult or child protective services or your local district attorney’s office. You can use these [resources](#) for other suggestions on how to report suspected cruelty.

For more information, check out the Rescue Central resources on [hoarding](#).

[†] HSVMA Webinar, “The Tipping Point: Spotting an Animal Hoarder”, 2013



ANIMAL INTAKE

Rescue groups often do not feel that they have much choice when it comes to bringing animals into their organization. They tend to bring in the ones in the greatest need—animals that are out of time at the local shelter or have serious medical or behavioral issues. Despite the temptation to always take on the hardest cases, organizations should try to balance the types of animals that come into the rescue. Take the difficult cases, but also take in a few easy ones to help offset monetary costs and increase your confidence.

Once an organization accepts an animal, the rescue group is generally expected to keep the animal until she has been adopted to her permanent home. There are exceptions (e.g., pulling a cat and later learning it was FeLV positive, accepting a dog that turned out to be more aggressive than the organization could have known), but if a rescue group is regularly transferring animals to other organizations because it does not have the necessary resources, the group needs to immediately reevaluate its policies. Further, the organization should stop accepting additional animals until it has a handle on its current population. This situation is different from when an organization partners with other rescue groups in a different area of the country and responsibly transfers animals to them on a regular basis.

SOURCES OF ANIMALS

Taking in animals from the streets, owner surrenders and local shelters are traditionally acceptable sources of animal intake, based on your organization's mission. If you take in strays, make sure you notify the local animal shelter and other rescue groups so that a unified effort can be made to reunite the pet with his owners. Acquiring pets directly from breeders, dealers or auctions, however, should be done more cautiously. By purchasing pets from an auction, for example, you may be inadvertently creating demand for dogs for sale, and perpetuating the problem of puppy mills. If your rescue group acquires pets from bulk sources of animals, make sure you consider all of the ramifications, and avoid creating a situation where unscrupulous breeders are profiting from your kindness. If you take in a litter, make sure the mother is also safe whether from a breeder, puppy mill or shelter.

Under no circumstances should a rescue group acquire pets by stealing them from their owners, no matter how poorly the animals are being treated. Instead, if you see [an animal being neglected or abused](#) you should immediately report this to your local animal control department or the police.

When determining the source of your organization's pets, consider the impact that it will have on your local community. For example, take stock of the shelters in your state and, if they are overcrowded or overwhelmed, think about reaching out locally before spending significant resources importing pets from other areas.

CREATING A PLAN

It is important to create a plan for every animal that comes through your organization. While most rescue groups have the luxury of time with their charges, it does not mean the animals should languish in foster homes. The faster you can adopt out your organization's animals, the more animals you can save. To create a plan, your rescue group should evaluate, both medically and behaviorally, every animal upon arrival and then keep the animal in a quiet and stress-free environment. You should also create a protocol for standard items that all animals need when entering your rescue, such as creating a new record in your system, scheduling a spay or neuter appointment along with implanting a microchip, administering vaccinations and setting reminders for booster shots.

Talk to your veterinarian about best practices for bringing a foster into a new home. You will probably want to isolate the foster from all other animals for a certain amount of time after arrival to ensure that there are no disease concerns. During that time, it is also important that the animal is housed in an area that can be properly and easily sanitized. Use the first few days to allow the animal to transition from her previous situation, feel safe, show her true personality and exhibit any health issues. After the animal has adjusted to her new situation, or after a time period of your organization's choosing, you should reevaluate the animal and update your findings and description.

While most rescue groups do not hesitate to take their charges to the veterinarian, it is also a good idea to have a list of trainers and behavior experts that you work with regularly to evaluate and train animals that have potential problems. Nipping any behavior issues in the bud as early as possible gives the pet the best chance for a successful adoption.



There are many different formal behavior assessments such as SAFER, Match-Up II, and Feline-ality. Explore the different options, get the proper training, and use the one that works for your organization.



When creating a plan for the animals that come through your organization, you should consider their age, health needs and psychological needs. A healthy young cat with special markings or litter of 10-week-old puppies should be fairly easy to adopt and the organization should try to find those animals a home as quickly as possible. Animals that need more time to heal or become comfortable in their new environment should not be pushed into adoption until they are truly ready. Then again, some people love adopting the hard-luck cases. You do not need to pass up such an adoption as long as you fully disclose any medical or behavioral issues (as with all adoptions). Some organizations use a medical waiver to ensure the adopter knows the animal is sick and promises to provide proper treatment.

While the [length-of-stay](#) concept was developed for shelters, the same theme applies to rescue groups. Essentially, this entails calculating how long on average animals stay in your organization from intake through adoption or other disposition to help determine your organization's efficiency. This also means putting more adoptable animals on a fast track to adoption and giving more space and time to pets who need a longer period of adjustment prior to going to a new home. This approach benefits all animals in your organization and allows you to rescue more animals over the course of a year. Check out these [resources](#) on fast-tracking your highly adoptable animals.

For any animal you might have long-term, you should have a plan that includes evaluation, training, fostering and marketing. You can find a sample intake plan in [Appendix D](#).

For organizations that utilize multiple adoption coordinators, each one should be in charge of a set number of animals that includes a range of fast-track and slow-track charges along with any that are in boarding or have to remain at a veterinarian's office. For example, if each adoption coordinator is in charge of 10 animals at a time, they should ideally have four that will be easy to adopt, four that will be more difficult to adopt and two that are staying at the veterinarian or boarding facility. This will ensure that someone is keeping tabs on all the animals that come into the rescue group and that no animal is inadvertently left at the veterinarian's office or boarding for months at a time. This system also sets the adoption coordinator up for success and prevents the frustration of having too many difficult charges at once.

PARTNER WITH A LOCAL SHELTER

Partnering with the local open admission shelter is a great way to build relationships and help solve the animal homelessness problem in your specific community. As many open admission shelters depend on rescue partners to help them reduce their animal populations, this partnership is crucial to decreasing euthanasia rates and provides a great source of animals in need for your organization.

Building a successful and productive relationship between rescue groups and local open admission shelters takes a lot of work and trust. It requires building mutual respect between the rescue and the shelter staff. Once you get to know each other as individuals, it will be much easier to work together on difficult issues. A few ways to start building mutually respectful and trusting relationships include:

- ✓ Take the shelter director and/or rescue coordinator out to lunch or hold an informal gathering.
- ✓ Hold monthly meetings to discuss animal welfare issues in your community.
- ✓ Ask the shelter to identify what they see as the major needs in the community and where they need the most help.
- ✓ Implement "no bash, no trash" agreements—if a shelter is not worried that anything they discuss with you may be used against them, they will be much more willing to work with you.
- ✓ Be accountable for things your volunteers and staff say and do—if they start spreading rumors, it is your reputation that is on the line.
- ✓ Ask the shelter to identify scenarios that concern them most about a partnership and build solutions to those issues before they even arise.

- ✓ Be a role model—if volunteers see the rescue group’s staff engaging in respectful behavior, they will follow suit.
- ✓ Eliminate the “us versus them” mentality—the language you use matters.
 - › Provide a “lifetime commitment to the animals” or an “adoption guarantee”.
 - › Instead of saying that you are “rescuing an animal from a shelter,” say you are “rescuing an animal with the shelter”.
- ✓ Treat the shelters as your partners.
 - › Talk to the shelter staff to get the full story about the animal and include the information in the animal’s bio.
 - › Follow up with the shelter to let them know the animals’ outcome.
- ✓ Share successes! Credit each other through social media and other outlets when there are happy stories that took the efforts of multiple animal welfare organizations. This will show that you are a united front and not separate agencies competing for public support.
- ✓ Identify issues and troubleshoot problems through open communication.
- ✓ Plan ahead—map out the year in an effort to solve problems before they even arise. For example, you know kitten season starts in April so start a joint campaign to adopt out as many cats as possible by March to make room.

This is not to say that if you see or hear of something happening in your local shelter that sounds questionable you should not do anything. Instead, go to the shelter with your concerns in a respectful manner and get to the bottom of the problem. Building strong relationships with the shelter staff will make those difficult conversations much easier to have. You can find [tips](#) on making positive changes at your local shelter.

When developing new relationships with shelter staff, it may be helpful to put yourself in their shoes. Rescue groups have the luxury of only taking in animals when they choose; but imagine if you could not limit the number of animals that came into your organization on a daily basis, nor know how many would be coming in every day. How would you feel if you found out that one of the rescue groups you transferred animals to was later charged with hoarding or cruelty? When we start to understand other people’s viewpoints, it allows us to be more compassionate toward them.

PET RETENTION STRATEGIES

There is tremendous value in realizing that many of the people who contact your organization to surrender their pet, or individuals who return a pet they adopted from you, do not truly want to give up their animals. Thankfully, many reasons for pet relinquishment are solvable problems. While the traditional solution to owner surrender placement requests is to automatically take in the pet for care and adoption, this can lead to an overwhelming number of pets to rehome. Moreover, this approach assumes that the pet's current home is not a good one since the animal is being surrendered, but even the best pet owners sometimes need a little extra support and knowledge. Many people are happy to be presented with a solution that might allow them to keep their pet.

By having either a few retention strategies or a formal program set up to offer guidance, solutions and free and low cost resources, you can help pets stay in the homes they already have and save your time, space and funds for animals who truly have nowhere to go.

For example, since many cat behavior issues are solvable, having a volunteer trained to provide cat behavior counseling over the phone can help many cats and owners stay together. This can prevent your group from being overloaded with cats that already had a good home, but whose owners just needed a bit of guidance. The HSUS's interactive [Cat Answer Tool](#) has detailed, user-friendly information on common cat behavior issues and solutions. It is a good learning tool for new cat behavior counselors and can also be a helpful resource for cat owners.

Other pet retention solutions and services you might offer are dog training using partner dog trainers who offer free or low cost training, including phone sessions; covering protocols to resolve common behavior issues such as house training, separation anxiety and inter-pet squabbles; tenant advocacy to help people keep their pets in the face of landlord threats when the law is on their side; low cost temporary boarding through partner kennels for pets of people in crisis; referrals to free and low cost spay/neuter and veterinarian care through partner veterinarians; creation of or referral to a pet food bank for people going through a financial rough spot; and allergy and shedding solutions.

Start small, with one resource, perhaps one that addresses the reason you most frequently encounter for owner surrenders. Then assess how the program is going and add to your list of solutions and resources when possible.

Offering your pet retention strategies to adopters from the beginning goes a long way toward preventing returns and setting your adopters up for success. Build relationships with your adopters so that they feel comfortable coming to you for assistance when issues arise. Some other ways to set your adopters up for success include sending the adopter home with pamphlets on how to handle common behavior and medical issues; letting them know about the pet retention methods you offer; always telling adopters

about any existing issues with the pet up front; and letting them know that you are there for assistance if they need help.

You can start your pet retention efforts by simply putting some supportive text on your website, in an automatic reply email and on your outgoing voicemail message. Look at the following websites to get ideas for wording you can use:

Downtown Dog Rescue

downtowndogrescue.org/resources/

San Jose Animal Care & Services

sanjoseca.gov/index.aspx?NID=1394

Philly Animal Care and Control Team

acctphilly.org/resources/

Asheville Humane Society's Safety Net Program

ashevillehumane.org/resources-and-assistance.php

Nevada Humane Society Online Behavior Tips

nevadahumanesociety.org/who_behavior.htm



OWNER SURRENDERS

If none of your pet retention strategies work, another option to offer people looking to rehome their pets is a courtesy post with your organization. Under those circumstances, the owner keeps the pet in his home while the rescue group helps find a new home by listing the pet through their usual means or bringing the pet to adoption events. A potential new owner would fill out your organization's application and the old owner would typically decide whether or not to approve it.

For those owner surrender pets you do take in, get as much medical and behavioral information about the pet as possible. You also need to ensure that the person surrendering the pet is indeed the actual owner. Ask for information (e.g., contract from wherever the individual obtained the pet, veterinarian bills, microchip registration, licensing) that suggests that the individual surrendering the pet is the only owner and have him sign a document stating that fact. You do not want to be in a situation where someone surrenders an animal and later the actual owner or co-owner comes to your facility to get the pet back.

When someone returns an animal they adopted from your rescue, make sure you record the reasons for the return. This will provide insight on what types of pet challenges the community can and cannot handle, and help you determine which surrender prevention resources you should work on first.

You can find a list of information to consider including in an owner surrender agreement in [Appendix E](#).

STRAYS

If your organization takes in strays, check your local laws regarding stray hold periods. Many communities have stray hold laws that require an organization to hold animals for a certain period of time to allow owners to find their lost pets. In some communities, only the organization that has the county contract is allowed to take in stray animals or only certain types of organizations (shelters versus rescue groups) are required to adhere to the stray hold.

If you do decide to take in strays, make sure you also have a program that tries to unite lost pets with their owners. Having a microchip scanner is essential as is creating some sort of community resource that allows lost pets and their owners to be reunited. Always notify the local animal control department and other rescue groups when you take in a stray; many owners do not think to contact multiple organizations when searching for their lost pet. This is a great opportunity to coordinate efforts with your local shelter or animal control agency. Having a centralized lost and found program for your community will help reunite more lost pets with their families.

TEMPORARILY HOLDING AN ANIMAL

Some rescue groups may want to offer people a temporary home for their pets to prevent owners from surrendering their animals while they solve a certain issue, such as hospitalization or recovery from a natural disaster. Before offering this service, however, you should think through all the potential issues and design a contract that addresses them. For example, how long are you willing to hold the animal and what happens if the owner fails to return? Who makes medical decisions for the animal while the pet is in the rescue's care? Who is responsible for veterinarian bills? What happens if the animal gets lost or escapes and causes damage or an accident? If the animal becomes seriously ill or injured, who makes the decision about euthanasia?

It is helpful to require the owner to have some sort of contact with you about the pet on a regular basis—whether it is in the form of in-person visits, emails or phone calls. It is also helpful to have the owner make a monthly payment, even if it is only a nominal amount. Both of these actions will help ensure that the human-animal bond is kept strong during the absence. Importantly, do not forget to listen when people come to you asking for temporary help. While they think they are asking for temporary fostering, perhaps what they really need is help with transport or keeping allergies at bay. If you dig a little deeper, you may be able to solve the problem without having to take in the animal at all.

You can find a list of information to consider including in a temporary owner surrender agreement in [Appendix F](#).



USE OF BOARDING FACILITIES

Some rescue groups have the luxury of their own holding facility or a relationship with a veterinarian or boarding facility that will provide them with kennel space. Best practices dictate that these types of housing facilities should be used as short-term and/or emergency situations only and no animal in a rescue group should be boarded indefinitely. For any animals boarded, you need to make a plan (including evaluation, training and marketing) to get them into a foster or permanent home as soon as possible. Moreover, daily enrichment and socialization is a must for any animal in boarding or a cage. Warehousing animals and letting them languish inside a cage is unacceptable.

TRANSPORTING PETS

Transporting pets is an important part of the rescue process for many communities. But doing it according to best practices is crucial to ensure the health and safety of all animals involved—the ones you are transporting, as well as any animals they come into contact with before and after transport. At a minimum, you need to comply with all state and federal laws, which in most states require a health certificate prior to transport.

The National Federation of Humane Societies created a list of [best practices](#) for transporting animals that every transporting vehicle and organization should follow.

SHELTER-TYPE FACILITIES

For those rescue groups that would like to use a facility to hold some or all of their animals, there are several options. One is to partner with a local pet store for some space. [PetSmart Charities](#) and other organizations have programs that include rescue groups as adoption partners, where approved rescue groups can keep animals in their stores. If you do not have either of those stores in your area, talk to a local [pet store](#). It can be a mutually beneficial relationship if done correctly—your animals have a place to stay and they may draw more customers into the store. Just make sure you have a contract in place that lays out what each party is responsible for (e.g., who cleans and cares for the animals, who provides the food, protocol for an emergency) to ensure a peaceful partnership.

Another option is to open your own adoption center or have office space that provides space for some of your animals. Just remember to comply with local laws, such as department of health requirements for facilities that house animals, zoning laws and any other relevant regulations.

It is also vital to comply with humane standards of care. See [Standards for Primary Enclosures](#) for information on what constitutes sufficient space in a [primary enclosure](#). For cats, it is important that they have at minimum 2 feet triangulated between their food, resting place and litter. For vertical enclosures or group housing situations, it is important that each cat have at least 18 square feet of space[†].

Keep in mind that it is essential to have a plan in place to get any animal whose primary enclosure is a cage into a foster or permanent home as quickly and as appropriately as possible. It is not fair to the animals to leave them in cages for an unlimited period of time. Animals who live in a cage must also receive daily enrichment and socialization.

[†] ASV GSC, pp. 8, 31



PROGRESSIVE ADOPTIONS

Having an innovative, progressive adoption program is essential to getting your animals into new homes and expanding your organization's ability to save more lives.

PROCESS

It is unfortunate, but the public's perception[†] is that many rescue groups have standards so strict that it is **almost impossible to adopt from them**. This only discourages people from adopting a pet, and instead drives them to purchase an animal from a breeder or pet store. Keep in mind that if someone comes to your organization wanting to adopt, they are already trying to do the right thing. You want to make potential adopters feel welcome and make dealing with your organization a positive experience to increase the chance that they will adopt a pet from your rescue.

Building a barrier-free adoption program starts with a philosophical commitment to celebrating people's willingness to adopt, meeting them where they are in terms of their attitudes towards and their understanding of pet care, and investing in their success with guidance and practical support. Putting this philosophy into practice requires several steps:

1. Implement progressive policies that remove barriers and increase options for homeless pets in your community.
2. Offer adoption counseling that relies on open and easy conversations to set pets and their owners up for success.
3. Develop marketing strategies that overcome barriers.
4. Train team members to deliver the program appropriately.

The animal welfare field is moving towards greater adoption success by building adoption programs that are based on research and data. A progressive, barrier-free adoptions policy means that rescue groups approach potential adopters in a non-judgmental manner that allows adoption counselors to get to know the potential adopter, reveal what issues concern the person and determine how to create a successful adoption. Through these conversation-based adoptions, you can build relationships with adopters so that they view rescue groups as a lifelong resource for their pets and return for advice and support when concerns crop up.

[†] *Pet Adoption & Spay/Neuter: Understanding Public Perceptions by the Numbers Webinar* 11-27-12, p.14–16

Progressive adoption programs put less emphasis on written applications and instead use open conversations to better understand and communicate with adopters. While rescue groups should collect basic contact information and a list of topics that the potential adopter wants to discuss, the application should forgo any lengthy inquisition. When organizations throw up barriers to adoptions, such as landlord checks, home visits, veterinarian checks, fence requirements, and verification of current pets' vaccinations, it can prevent one of your animals from going to a loving home. But it will not stop a potential adopter from getting a pet from another source. Barriers merely provide a false sense of security. As unsettling as it may be, in reality, you have no control over what happens to a pet from the moment she and her new owner walk out your door and head for home. And despite commonly held fears, agencies that aim for barrier-free adoption policies are not placing animals carelessly; they just take care not to miss out on opportunities to place their animals into good homes.

While there are millions of pet dogs and cats living in U.S. homes, only about 40% of pets come from shelters or rescue groups. This statistic suggests that the majority of pet owners are able to successfully care for their pets without the need for approval or assistance from animal welfare organizations. By trusting adopters and providing them with the support and information they need without judgment, you can place more animals in good homes and save more lives.

Ensuring that your policies are current with the latest research will help you reach more adopters and increase your lifesaving capacity. For example, [studies](#) show that, despite fears in the animal welfare community, adopting out animals for a reduced fee, or even no fee, does not increase the likelihood that pets will end up in the wrong hands. The bond created between people and their pets means more than any amount paid. New research also indicates that [pets given as gifts](#) are not more likely to be relinquished. Thus, rescues should reconsider blanket policies that ban adopting out pets to be given as gifts. Of course, in such cases, organizations should work closely with adopters to learn about the gift recipient and ensure a good match.

Another way to gain the trust of potential adopters is to implement a "satisfaction guarantee" adoption policy. This entails judgment-free adoptions as well as judgment-free, no-fault returns. In addition to always taking back an animal the organization has adopted out, it means allowing the individual to adopt another animal without judgment. Keep a positive spin on returns. Realize that they can provide your organization with crucial information about a pet so that a better match can be made in the future. Staying positive also increases the chance that your group will retain the former adopter as a supporter and a potential home for another animal. And while it is a good idea to keep a few spots open for inevitable returns, rescue groups should also allow adopters to rehome an animal themselves.



Because returns can be unpredictable, allowing adopters to rehome an animal can save rescue groups time and resources. Adopters should provide rescue groups with the new owner's contact information so that the organization can continue to offer support to that pet.

It is important to make adopters feel welcomed at every stage, including returns, without fear that they may be ridiculed. Above all, it is crucial not to vent about your customers or potential customers through social media, or any other means of communication, as no one wants to adopt from a group that might criticize them. Avoid creating a culture in your organization where people are bad, wrong, or stupid—they are who rescue groups rely on to find homes for the animals, and organizations should embrace the opportunity to share helpful information.

At the end of the adoption process, many rescue groups use an adoption contract to formalize the agreement between the adopting organization and the adopter. In addition to demonstrating transfer of ownership from the adopting agency to the adopter, adoption contracts also serve to protect adoption agencies from future liability.

Consult with an attorney who is licensed in your state and familiar with issues pertaining to animal law when drafting or implementing legal documents such as contracts. Not only do you want to ensure that such documents are tailored to meet the requirements of all federal, state and local laws, you also want to ensure that your organization is protected in the event that there are future issues with the pet.

Examine your contract to make sure you are not undermining your adopter-friendly approach. For example, replace “no refunds” language and demands to return animals to your agency if adopters cannot keep them. Instead, focus on influencing pet care through engaging adoption conversations and follow-up support.

As far as deciding what fee to charge, conduct market research in your area and find out what other shelters and local rescue groups charge, as many adopters check prices at various organizations in a community before deciding which one to adopt from. It is important to set the fee at an amount that is not so high that it constitutes a barrier to adoption; charging a reasonable and competitive fee offers adopters an additional incentive to choose your organization.

SETTING YOUR ADOPTERS UP FOR SUCCESS

A crucial part of adoptions is setting your adopter up for success. Remember that it should be up to the potential adopter to determine what makes a good match. Adopters have a sense not only of what kind of pet they are looking for, but more importantly, what their concerns are. Many people looking to bring a new pet into their lives admit to worrying that a rescued pet will be unhealthy or that not enough is known about the animal’s background. Find out what issues concern a potential adopter about adopting a pet and have a direct conversation addressing those issues.

While there are several programs that help adopters make a match based on personalities and lifestyle, no matching system is perfect and many potential adopters choose with their heart. The avid runner may want a lazy pet around the house. The couch potato may want a more active dog to motivate him to exercise. The adults in a family with young children could be seasoned dog trainers. If a potential adopter wants a specific pet there is no reason an organization should not let the individual try out the adoption. Call the arrangement a trial period, a foster-to-adopt or something similar. What is the worst that could happen? The pet is returned after a couple of weeks and you and the pet are no worse off than before the trial. Remember not to judge the adopter for a return, allow the person to adopt another pet from your organization and view the experience as an opportunity to gather more information about the animal. The best outcome? The adoption works out and you have a happy adopter and a happy pet.

In addition to copies of all medical and behavioral information on the specific animal, send adopters home with information that lets them know what to expect with a new pet. For example, how can they expect the pet to behave on the first day in a new

home? What kind of food should the pet eat and how much per day? What are some common medical and behavioral issues and ways to resolve them? When it is time to take a pet to the veterinarian? Addressing common pet issues, as well as specific concerns identified by the adopter, and explaining the “satisfaction guarantee” policy will put adopters on the path to success.

When resources allow, it is a good idea to follow up after an adoption to build your personal relationship with the pet owner, provide support to the adopter and her pet and possibly enhance your visibility and reputation within the larger community. A happy adopter can become a repeat adopter, recommend the organization to a friend or become a volunteer, donor or foster provider for your rescue group. So, if possible, have someone contact adopters after they take their new pet home to check in and offer support if needed. Ask the adopter when and how he prefers to be contacted (usually phone or email), and let him know that your organization is available for assistance and advice. If it is not possible for your rescue to proactively follow up with adopters, be sure to let them know that the organization is always available to assist with questions or concerns. Provide adopters with a phone number or email address that gives them direct access to someone at your organization. Setting your adopters up for success from the beginning will make it much more likely that you will end up with satisfied adopters in the long run.

EVENTS AND OTHER ADVERTISING

A large part of adoptions success also depends on where you hold adoption events and how you market the animals, especially ones that may be more difficult to place. Partnering with [PetSmart Charities](#) or a [pet store](#) are good options, but do not forget to think outside the box. Holding adoption events in areas that get a lot of foot traffic, such as grocery stores, big box stores, farm supply and garden centers and even car dealerships, allows you to reach potential adopters who might not stop at a pet store.

The UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program recommends having different types of animals at an adoption event, while keeping in mind that too many animals at one time can be overwhelming. “Consider species, age, breed, color, behavior, and special characteristics when evaluating the need for variety. While many adopters are seeking friendly, healthy, young animals, some will seek out hard luck cases, older animals and those with special challenges.”[†]

[†] aspcapro.org/sites/pro/files/using_adoption_capacity_calculator_7_2013.pdf

As far as advertising the animals in your organization, always be truthful about any medical or behavioral issues. You can put a positive spin on them (“Fluffy prefers to have you all to herself” as opposed to “Fluffy hates other cats”), but never lie—it will ruin your organization’s credibility. Do not forget to promote your harder-to-adopt pets (e.g., special needs, geriatric), too. Using special promotions or cute marketing gimmicks will help move those difficult cases into homes in no time.

For more information, including a complete guide on how to create a progressive adoption program, check out the Rescue Central resources on [adoptions](#) and the [Adopters Welcome manual](#).

FOSTER HOMES

Foster homes are the backbone of many rescue groups—without a strong network of foster providers, rescue groups simply could not take in as many animals. Having a structured fostering program is essential to the organization’s ability to care for animals.

Once you decide how to structure your fostering operations, develop a manual explaining your standard operating procedures. A foster manual for staff, volunteers and foster families to reference is critical; it should make clear how your program is structured, what the expectations are, who the primary contacts will be, how certain common situations will be handled and who to contact in case of a veterinary emergency. The foster manual must be easily accessible to foster providers at all times.

Make sure you are clear upfront about what expenses the rescue group will handle and which the foster provider will be responsible for. Be honest with foster providers about what they are getting themselves into and try to ease them in. Give new foster providers the easy charges until you have seen their dedication and pet care abilities. It is of course important that foster provider’s own pets are all healthy and generally well-cared for. Provide plenty of opportunities that help the foster providers get their animals adopted. Morale and motivation are higher when foster providers have frequent success and do not have animals staying in their homes for years on end. Remember that your foster providers may need an occasional break, especially the ones that take in hard cases.

Keep track of how many pets (owned and foster) each foster provider has at any given time and do not let well-intentioned people take on too many animals.

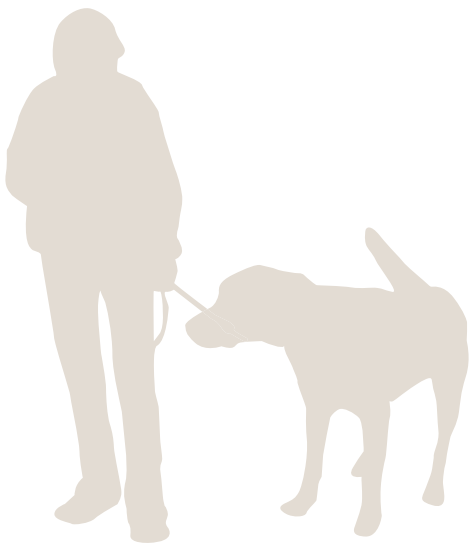
For more information, including [sample applications and handbooks](#), check out the Rescue Central resources on [fostering success](#).

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Regardless of the type of organization you run, it is important to have a disaster preparation plan in place so your group is prepared for the unexpected. If you have a facility, make sure you have overhead sprinklers in case of a fire and conduct a walk-through with a member of your local fire department. Foster-based organizations should provide foster homes with clear instructions about what to do in an emergency situation and also determine how they are going to communicate with foster providers if a disaster occurs. Every organization should have emergency contacts and know where boarding facilities and pet-friendly hotels are located in case of an evacuation. Foster providers should have an emergency kit for their charges containing food and supplies for at least three days.

All organizations should ensure that their files are backed up on a regular basis and are available from anywhere. You do not want to be in a position where, for example, you cannot board a pet because your vaccination records are inaccessible.

For more information, check out the resources on [disaster preparedness](#).



SECTION 4

COMMUNITY BUILDING



Your rescue will not be able to find a home for every homeless animal in your community on its own. To solve the problem of pet homelessness, it will take a concerted effort from many members of the community. Building strong relationships with others will help keep the focus on the animals.

WITH OTHER ANIMAL WELFARE ADVOCATES

A significant reduction of the euthanasia rate in a community is not possible without strong collaboration among many community actors.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS TO INCREASE LIFESAVING EFFORTS

Joining forces with other animal welfare advocates will greatly enhance your ability to save lives and find more homes for animals. A collaborative effort between your organization and the following programs and partners is required to create a safe community for pets. Many of these programs and partners likely already exist in your community; determine which organizations are advocating for animals and reach out to them to figure out a way to work together. And if any of these programs are missing, it may be the perfect time to start one.

» SHELTERS

Most communities have several different types of shelters that take in animals. An open admission shelter takes in every animal that comes through its doors, as well as strays and other animals in need. Limited admission shelters have more input as to which and how many animals they take in. As a community, we need to try to keep animals out of the shelter, but once they arrive at the door, shelters can provide them with the safe and enriching environment they need until they can be adopted.

» RESCUE GROUPS

These organizations often act as transfer partners to help keep shelter populations at a manageable level, allowing all animals to receive humane care and more pets to find loving homes. In addition to foster-based groups, this category also includes prevention-based organizations and trap-neuter-return (TNR) groups that manage community colonies and keep those cats out of the shelter.

» HIGH-VOLUME, LOW-COST SPAY/NEUTER & VACCINATION CLINICS

These organizations make sterilization and vaccines accessible to everyone in the community. This, in turn, helps to reduce the number of homeless animals.

» VETERINARIANS AND COST ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

It is crucial to have a partner within the veterinary community that provides services to shelters and rescues at a reduced cost. Veterinarians can also potentially provide cost assistance programs that cover sterilization, medical care, vaccinations, pet food and other pet-related products for low income households, enabling families in need to give their pets the best care.

» LICENSING PROGRAMS AND ANIMAL CONTROL AGENCIES

Communities may want to consider charging higher rates for intact animals to help encourage people to sterilize their pets. This is also the entity that is responsible for enforcing anti-cruelty laws and investigating claims of abuse and neglect.

» EDUCATION

Rescue groups and shelters need to be a resource to the public for informed pet ownership. Offer a bevy of free information sessions to encourage people to utilize certain programs such as: vaccinations, licenses, spay and neuter opportunities, training and so on. It is also essential to implement a surrender prevention program to help keep pets in their homes and out of the shelter. Developing a lost pet program will help reunite pets with their families.

» BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

Develop relationships with local vendors to get them involved. Pet stores can donate products or space for events, while other local businesses can help raise funds or donate supplies. This also provides additional channels to spread the word about adoptions or other services that your organization may offer. Get local trainers and behaviorists involved with your organization. Ask the media to cover a special event or donate remainder advertising space.

BUILDING A TRANSFER PROGRAM WITH LOCAL SHELTERS

Part of having a good relationship with your local open admission shelter or animal control agency involves becoming eligible to accept animals from them. This helps the shelter keep its population at a manageable level and allows you the chance to provide assistance to animals in need of specialized care that the shelter does not have the resources to cover. Many shelters already have a process in place through which they approve new partners, but do not be afraid to have an honest conversation with them if there is something in the application or overall program that concerns you. For example, some shelters insist on an inspection before approving an organization as a placement partner, but that requirement may not make sense if you are a foster-based organization. Instead, offer to send the shelter data that will give them the information they want, such as the number of animals you took in the prior year, number of animals you adopted out, number of foster homes, average number of animals per foster home and average length of time an animal stays in your foster program. If necessary, you can agree to permit an inspection at a mutually agreeable time if a problem should arise. You should also offer to send the shelter monthly statistics on the animals (e.g., whether they have been adopted, any health issues) as transparency helps build trust.

Make sure that any agreement has clear policies on who is eligible to pull animals, how the shelter determines which animals are available for transfer to rescues, how they notify rescue groups of the available animals, how much time you have to accept an animal and pick it up from the shelter, how the animal is transferred from the shelter to the rescue, what is included in the transfer (e.g., sterilization, vaccines, microchip, medication, FIV/FeLV testing) and what fees the shelter will charge.

Also, do not be afraid to negotiate. If a shelter typically insists that rescues accept whatever animals it selects, but your organization specializes in Pomeranians or senior cats, let them know. (By the same token, do not insist on taking every Pomeranian, for example, that comes into the shelter, as the shelter may want to adopt out certain animals themselves.) While you cannot take all the highly adoptable animals, try to take easy cases from time to time to give your organization a break. Let the shelter know what medical and behavioral cases your organization can and cannot handle. If the shelter charges fees for pulling animals or medical treatment they have provided, talk to them if those fees are prohibitively high for your organization and work on a compromise. If you approach them in a respectful manner, talk about your concerns, listen to theirs and can think a little creatively, you should be able to reach a mutually acceptable agreement that will allow you to save more lives together.



Do keep in mind that if the shelter is able to adopt out an animal, it is a win-win situation for everyone as the shelter gets an adoption and it is one less animal for your organization to care for.

BUILDING A TRANSFER PROGRAM WITH OUT-OF-STATE RESCUES

Many organizations transfer animals to rescue groups in different parts of the country where the supply of animals is low. Always adhere to [state and local laws](#) when transferring animals across state lines. At minimum you will need to get a health certificate from your veterinarian. If your organization does transfer animals to other rescue groups or sanctuaries, ensure that the receiving organization provides the same level of care that you would provide. Find your “rescue soul mate”—a partner organization that shares your group’s philosophies on core issues such as adoption policies,



temperament testing, fostering, training, medical protocols and when it is appropriate to euthanize.

Visiting a facility, or meeting with people from the receiving rescue in person, is a crucial step in confirming that the animal is being transferred to an organization that follows best practices.

Some transfer programs take animals from the shelter and transport them directly to adopters. But fostering makes a huge difference, not only helping to ensure that the animals are physically healthy when they are sent on their way, but providing the animals with some time in a home to grow more emotionally and behaviorally healthy. Allowing animals to settle down and relax in a home environment can be an important step in preparing them for a long trip and the new environment that awaits.

Placing animals in foster care before their trip also gives the organizations insight into the animals' true personalities, allowing your partner to advertise the animals with accurate descriptions before they even arrive at their destination. It is also important to provide the destination partner with all medical records and behavioral notes.

BUILDING COALITIONS

Building a coalition of many animal welfare and protection organizations in your area is another method of getting the message out concerning homeless animals on a community level. It is also a great way to keep tabs on the progress your community is making and to identify and troubleshoot any problems as a team. While coalitions are not always easy to build, the payoff can be well worth your efforts.

Reach out to other shelters and rescue groups and insist on humane discourse among all parties. You want to create a safe space to work together. Early meetings should focus on establishing a culture of respect, trust and accountability. Start small, with a limited and specific focus—determine why you are meeting, what you hope to accomplish and identify your short-term and long-term goals and projects. Early projects could be as basic as having joint events to establish a culture of respect and trust.

It is vital to always keep your common goals in mind and remember that this is about the animals, not individual egos. Some common goals could be:

- ✓ Keep animals from entering the shelter
- ✓ Create a safe environment for those who do end up in the shelter
- ✓ Improve rates for adoptions, returns to owner and transfers to rescue groups
- ✓ Eliminate euthanasia of adoptable animals

It is important to acknowledge that there will be differences in opinions among the players and know that it is perfectly acceptable to disagree!

Choose someone to lead the group who has a calm demeanor and strong interpersonal skills, and is neutral, fair, patient, a good listener, open-minded, determined and experienced with conflict resolution. Instead of someone who may criticize the participants' current efforts, choose someone who will focus on everyone's strengths to determine how to solve areas of weakness. It may even be preferable to get an outside facilitator to lead the early meetings.

Remember to identify other benefits of working in a coalition and resources you can share such as trainings, adoption space and workshops.

When set up carefully, a coalition can be a great resource to all animal advocates in a community and help organizations save more lives.

For more information, check out the Rescue Central resources on [Coalition Building](#).

WITH YOUR SUPPORTERS

While having solid operations is crucial, it will not mean as much if you do not have a way to get your message out. A communications plan should include ways to engage supporters in both one-way conversations (such as a website and newsletters) and two-way conversations (such as social media sites) to make the biggest impact.

WEBSITE

Building a good website is essential to your operations. Your website is often the first place people come to get to know your organization, so make sure it tells a story. There are many programs out there that make it easy to build a website, even if you do not have any computer programming experience. Having a clear and professional website will allow you to make the best possible impression on potential supporters.

Some items you should post on your website are: Your organization's contact information, including email, phone number, city and state; your mission statement; a list of staff and board members; a current list of adoptable animals; information on how to adopt, foster, and volunteer; and a very easy way for people to donate.

Many of the universal pet adoption sites (e.g., Petfinder, Petango) make it easy to link your list of adoptable pets to your organization's website. Many [software programs](#) will update the list on the pet adoption site and your webpage simultaneously.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Using social media is one of the best ways to build a community for your organization. It is great for marketing your rescue, showcasing adoptable animals, engaging new and existing supporters, recruiting additional foster providers and volunteers and fundraising. The list of social media applications is growing by the day. Think about which sites will work most effectively for your organization, as well as how many you will have time to keep current. Remember, if you open up a dialogue with supporters, responding to their comments and questions in a timely manner is an essential part of maintaining good customer service.

Think of your website as a one-way conversation that allows you to disseminate information about your organization, and view social media as a tool that allows you to have a two-way conversation with your supporters. It is important to create a social media policy so that your organization is strategic in terms of the content and timing of any posts. This is especially important when more than one person has access to the organization's social media account. You want to ensure that your messaging is

consistent across every medium you use. Thus, it is a good idea to have at least one person in charge of monitoring your group's postings and ensuring that inquiries are answered in a timely manner. Social media is also a great way to show you are part of a team by giving praise or "shout-outs" to partner organizations.

Keep the posts interesting and diversify the content to hold the attention of your supporters. For example, showcase an animal ready for adoption, next make a fundraising appeal for an animal in need of extensive medical attention and then follow up with an announcement about your upcoming adoption events. Use stories that pull on the heartstrings sparingly and be sure to show the end result—"before and after" photos make it easier for your viewers to handle the difficult parts of the story.

It is important to keep your followers updated on all action requests, whether you are asking them to donate for medical costs or meet a special need to foster or adopt an animal, so that your supporters remain engaged and ready to help again.

Above all, remember to always be professional in your postings and comments—your online presence is the face of your organization and you want it to be a positive one.

You can find more [tips](#) on building a social media presence.

For more information, check out the Rescue Central resources on [Making the Most of Social Media](#).



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ABOUT THE HSUS

The Humane Society of the United States is the nation's largest animal protection organization, rated the most effective by its peers. Since 1954, The HSUS has been fighting for the protection of all animals through advocacy, education, and hands-on programs. We rescue and care for tens of thousands of animals each year, but our primary mission is to prevent cruelty before it occurs. We're there for all animals, across America and around the world.

ABOUT PETSMART CHARITIES®

PetSmart Charities, Inc. is a non-profit animal welfare organization that saves the lives of homeless pets. More than 400,000 dogs and cats find homes each year through our adoption program in all PetSmart stores and our sponsored adoption events. PetSmart Charities grants more money to directly help pets in need than any other animal welfare group in North America, with a focus on funding spay/neuter services that help communities solve pet overpopulation. PetSmart Charities is a 501(c)(3) organization, separate from PetSmart, Inc. To learn more about how PetSmart Charities is working toward its vision of a lifelong, loving home for every pet, call 1-800-423-PETS (7387) or visit petsmartcharities.org.

Celebrating Animals | Confronting Cruelty



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