



**Humane  
World for  
Animals™**

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



# Humane Policy Toolkit

**A multipronged approach to building  
pet-friendly communities**



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# Introduction

Policies that support animal health and well-being are essential for creating and sustaining humane communities. These policies should balance public health and safety with animal welfare needs, enabling harmonious coexistence. State laws and local ordinances can be tailored to suit a community's unique needs, such as by describing a baseline level for standards of care, identifying barriers to care, and developing programs and funding streams to support pets and their families.

Laws can't exist in a vacuum; many challenges that face pets and their families can be addressed by increasing pet resources and removing barriers to accessing them. When drafting laws, much thought should be given to how they may be enforced and whether proactive community support may lead to better outcomes for pets and families.

According to data from the American Veterinary Medical Association, more than 163.5 million pet dogs and cats lived in American households in 2024. Policies should reflect the important role of companion animals in our society. When pet

owners are unable to access pet resources, it often stems from issues of inequity and societal barriers that are out of their control, such as poverty, lack of information or unavailability of resources. The amount of money people spend on their pets isn't indicative of how much they love them.

Municipal leaders should also consider animals when making decisions on public health and safety issues, public works and disaster preparedness. Policies should incorporate clear standards of care to maintain animal welfare goals, without being overly strict or punitive. Municipalities and states should address animal-related issues not only in the law, but also in the budget. If certain standards are to be met, funding is necessary to support all pet owners in your community.

Keep in mind that there's no one-size-fits-all policy. Every community should evaluate its unique needs through a holistic lens and implement realistic and reasonable laws based on what will work there. That said, successful policies tend to share the following features:

**Feasible.** Laws need to be realistic given the community's resources. Give thought to the time, effort and money the municipality will need to execute the policy, as well as the time, effort and money pet owners will need to comply. Do you want to provide no-cost or reduced-cost spay/neuter for all pets in the community? Or require annual inspections for pet stores and commercial breeders? Where will funding for surgeries or inspectors come from? Find a resourceful way to generate a consistent funding stream.

**Enforceable.** Enforceability issues often appear in policies that may conflict with state or federal law. For example, a regulation that grants law enforcement unfettered access to an organization's foster homes may not pass muster with constitutional search-and-seizure protections. Policies must also be enforceable from a practical perspective. For example, a tethering law that's based on time limits can be tricky to enforce because officers rarely have blocks of time available to verify that a dog has been tied beyond a designated time limit.

**Clear.** If laws impact community members, they must be easy to understand. Ensure you've considered the time and money it will take to inform residents of a new change before punitive measures are taken. Take into consideration the common languages in your community and budget for multilingual resources. Laws should also have a clear appeal process for pet owners.

**“**Keep in mind that there's no one-size-fits-all policy. Every community should evaluate its unique needs through a holistic lens and implement realistic and reasonable laws based on what will work there.”

**Nonpunitive.** Requiring strict adherence to policies without allowing flexibility based on the circumstances carries a significant risk of unfairly penalizing people. Instead of creating a situation that removes animals from loving homes (such as through pet limit laws) or prevents pets from being reunited with their families (such as with mandatory lost pet reclaim fees), you can craft laws that work with communities and provide the necessary resources that support families in making healthy choices for their pets.

**Relevant.** Policies should be carefully drafted to ensure the anticipated outcome will be achieved. For example, mandatory spay/neuter won't increase sterilization rates if there's a lack of access to veterinary services in the community, and cat licensing won't decrease a community cat population because there are no owners to obey the law. Make sure the policy language is crafted in a way that will produce a desirable solution to a given challenge.





## Chapter 1

# Laws aren't always the answer

**Before advocating for new legislation**, especially laws involving criminal penalties, consider whether the issue at hand reflects a broader systemic challenge or an isolated incident. Laws have real and lasting impacts on people and animals alike. To ensure fairness and effectiveness, any legislative effort should be rooted in data, evidence and community needs—not driven by fear, frustration or isolated events.

We encourage advocates and officials to critically examine whether new laws or changes to existing laws are truly the best way to achieve a desired outcome. A policy change might seem like a quick fix to a complicated problem, but a community is often better served by a solution outside the legal system. For example, a low-cost spay/neuter program would be a more effective way to increase pet sterilization rates in your community than a legal mandate on spay/neuter.

Other times, new laws aren't necessary because there's an existing provision in the code that simply needs to be enforced. For example, communities don't need to enact a pet limit law if enforcing the existing cruelty ordinance would address severe cases requiring legal action.

We encourage you to think outside the box when working to strengthen animal welfare in your community and always ask these questions:

- Is this law really necessary?
- What are the goals and likely outcomes?
- Could there be unintended consequences?

Like many other aspects of life, the best defense is a good offense. That is, the most effective way to keep the community safe from animal bites, minimize disease or elevate basic care issues is through proactive outreach. It's helpful when law enforcement and animal care and control agencies build a visible, positive presence in the community and have multiple touchpoints with residents



and animals long before problems arise.

Proactive approaches can often accomplish much more than reactive, legislative responses and are an essential component to enforcement of any regulation. For example, if you pass a law setting minimum shelter standards for outside dogs, you could partner with a local animal welfare organization to distribute appropriate dog housing to pet owners in need.

For the times that you decide a regulation, law or ordinance is the best way to achieve your goals, see “Steps to pass a local ordinance” in Appendix A of this toolkit.

The following chapters include recommendations to help you craft thoughtful policies for common pet management issues. Use the summary checkpoints to ensure your policies are as effective as possible.



## Chapter 2

# Access to care

**Access to care is the opportunity** and ability for all people caring for companion animals to identify animal care needs, obtain necessary resources to preserve and improve animal health and welfare, and keep people and pets together. This is a cornerstone of Humane World for Animals' philosophy, which recognizes that the bond between people and their pets exists in every community, regardless of income or circumstance.

Translating that belief into policy means expanding equitable

access to veterinary and health resources for pets and people experiencing poverty and living in underserved areas.

While municipal ordinances play an important role in protecting animals and promoting public health, they can unintentionally create barriers for people who already face challenges accessing care. Effective policies must recognize these inequities and support access to care, rather than deepening disparities.



### Available

Providers and resources exist to provide timely care when and where it is needed.



### Attainable

Individuals can reach the available resources with minimal barriers to access.



### Affordable

Resources are within the financial means of the population being served.



### Appropriate

Resources are relevant and suitable to the needs and capacities of the animals, caregivers and community.

Providers practice with cultural humility, attention to the needs and resources of each pet family, and respect for the pet caregiver's expertise and decisions.



### Accepted

Individuals have knowledge of when and how to access resources and willingness to engage with the system of care.



## Chapter 3

# The basics: Pet-keeping policies

### More than 163.5 million cats and dogs live in U.S.

**homes**, and the vast majority of owners consider their pets to be part of their family. On average, only 3.5% of animals in a community enter the shelter and rescue system each year. People love their pets and do their best to care for them, yet not everyone has equal access to pet resources.

To support pets in your community, set clear standards for animal care and work with advocates and organizations to provide the resources and infrastructure that will support community members in meeting those standards. For example, make spay/neuter accessible, create a pet food bank and provide resources to build fences. Building a robust support system can substantially decrease the need for enforcement as a response.

Of course, large-scale and intentional cruelty exist, but more commonly, there are systemic barriers that create challenges for people and pets. When you start with the understanding that the vast majority of people want to provide the best care for their pets, the exceptions and challenges become more manageable.

Humane World for Animals recommends that communities assess and address the need for pet-keeping policies for dogs and cats separately. Supporting both species is important, and they

each have distinct challenges and solutions. Cat challenges can't be solved with dog solutions and vice versa.

**Humane care:** The best way to set acceptable care standards in your community is through strengthening state cruelty laws and defining humane care based on meeting animals' needs in five areas—nutrition, environment, health, opportunity and mental state—a framework known as the Five Domains. Local ordinances can specify what basic care would look like in your community's unique environment. For example, state law may require proper shelter for animals kept confined outdoors, but local ordinances can get more granular, stipulating the details of what constitutes proper shelter. Standards for adequate food, water, air, light, space, sanitation, veterinary care, shelter/protection from the elements and others can be more clearly defined by ordinances that apply the appropriate standards to the particulars of each community.

These laws and regulations allow a community to set legal minimum standards for animal care, and they can be a strong asset for animal care and control agencies investigating cruelty and neglect. Local ordinances are also frequently used to supplement state anti-cruelty statutes by prescribing additional criminal and civil penalties and accounting for animal care and neglect problems that may be unique to the local community. For example, regulations for tethering a dog outside without protection in inclement weather might be handled differently in Houston, Texas, than in Portland, Maine.

- Does your policy establish minimum standards of care for pets?
- Does your policy establish enforceable penalties for animal cruelty?
- Is your policy clear and attainable to the public given the community's available resources?
- Do you have support services available to help people come into compliance?



**Pet limits:** In general, limits on the number of pets permitted in each household isn't an effective way to prevent hoarding, neglect or cruelty. There's no scientific evidence supporting a "magic number" of pets in a household that guarantees quality care. Instead, these laws create a significant enforcement burden for law enforcement with little gained.

Setting an arbitrary limit unduly penalizes people who are able to provide a loving home for multiple pets, may result in unnecessary removal of animals from their homes, increases the burden on an already strained shelter system, and creates a false sense of security that all compliant owners are providing adequate care, as frequently happens when welfare agents become busier counting heads than looking at body scores (i.e., an animal's physical condition).

Moreover, if the definition of an "owner" is overly broad, these policies can negatively affect community (feral and stray) cat caregivers. A better approach is to have strong cruelty laws in place that apply regardless of the number of animals present.

- Does your policy avoid placing arbitrary restrictions on the number of pets who may be kept in a single household?

**Pets in cars:** Every year, pets die or suffer severe organ damage from being left in a car when the owner thought an errand would only take a minute or didn't realize how hot the inside of the car would become. It takes only a few minutes before temperatures inside a car can mount to a lethal level. Animals are ill-equipped to handle the heat and humidity because they don't have sweat glands and can't release the heat that builds up inside their bodies.



State and local regulations authorizing first responders and good Samaritans to act without fear of criminal or civil liability if certain conditions apply can help strike a balance between protecting pets and empowering vigilantism gone amok. (Regulations to prevent injury to pets being transported in vehicles can also be included, such as addressing unrestrained dogs in the back of pickup trucks.)

Information sharing is key to preventing these tragedies, since not everyone is aware of the danger that heat poses to their pets. This issue presents a great opportunity to get the community involved in using methods other than the legislative process to solve a problem. For example, community advocates can encourage commercial businesses to post signs reminding shoppers not to leave their pets in the car and providing the local animal care and control agency phone number in case of emergency. They can also work with rest stops and welcome centers to create pet-friendly

areas, helping travelers avoid situations where they have no choice but to leave their pet in their vehicle.

- Does your policy enable members of the public to help pets in dangerous situations?
- Does your policy prohibit animals from being left in dangerous situations, such as hot cars?
- Does your policy prohibit dangerous means of securing animals in a moving vehicle?

**Wild animals as pets:** Nondomesticated/wild animals (species that haven't been raised, bred and genetically adapted over centuries to live with humans) pose a great risk to public health and safety, domesticated animals and local ecosystems. They can also cause serious property destruction.

Captive wild animals suffer immensely from neglectful and poor conditions common in the exotic and wild pet trade. Many people lack the knowledge, facilities and resources necessary to provide wild animals with the care, housing and diet that are unique to each species.

- Does your policy prevent people from keeping inappropriate animals as pets?

**Abandonment policies:** Abandonment statutes are often included to address the intentional leaving of a pet by owners or those with custody of an animal. In communities with high eviction rates or those without an animal shelter that's able to take in pets when families are in crisis, abandonment may be a symptom of a broader systemic issue and not the problem itself. Creating safety nets for people who may need to leave their home quickly and shelters that have a culture of nonjudgment toward families in the difficult position of having to relinquish a pet can help prevent abandonment.

Abandonment statutes need to be clearly drafted to provide law enforcement with enforceable provisions that define what actually constitutes abandonment. Abandonment laws often unintentionally include returning a cat to their original location as part of a trap-neuter-return effort as a violation, because many policies were written before the widespread use of TNR and didn't consider that caring for community cats could benefit both the animals and the community. Leave no doubt as to the legality of TNR by including a simple exemption indicating that returning unowned cats to the location where the cat was found—after being sterilized, vaccinated and ear-tipped—is not considered abandonment, and that those conducting TNR aren't considered owners.

- Does your policy include a clear, appropriate and enforceable definition of abandonment?
- Does your policy clarify that TNR isn't abandonment and that caretakers aren't considered the owners of the cats?

## Chapter 4

# Dog-friendly communities

**Policies to address free-roaming dogs** and inhumane chaining/tethering should focus on the basics of leash and safe confinement laws as a useful approach for instituting humane standards, establishing social norms and preventing problems before they occur.

Regulations, programs and services must apply and be accessible to all dog owners. Ensuring equitable access helps build a strong support system and promotes positive outcomes for dogs, their families and the community.

**Leash/at-large laws:** Restraint laws generally require owners to adequately and safely confine or restrain pets both on and off their property, but they also recognize that accidents happen and dogs get loose. In fact, one in three pets will go missing in their lives. The good news is that many challenges that arise from loose dogs, such as car accidents and dog bites, can be addressed with prevention programs. Animal services and law enforcement can use these interactions to offer proactive measures such as providing low- or no-cost microchipping, pet ID tags, nylon collars and leashes, fence-building resources or containment advice.

According to a recent study, when a dog does get loose, they're likely near their home. Field services officers and others should prioritize returning dogs directly to their home, especially if they have identification. When lost dogs are reunited with their owners without ever entering an animal shelter, it prevents unnecessary intakes and provides an opportunity to learn what support the owner may need to keep their dog safely contained.

When a dog must be brought to a shelter, efforts should be made to find the owner through lost-and-found pet postings and other means. According to Human Animal Support Services data, over 60% of animals entering shelters are lost pets. Focusing on proactive measures and reuniting lost pets with their families as quickly as possible saves towns and counties money. For more on return-to-owner approaches used by animal care and control



agencies, check out “Ask the experts: Return-to-owner strategies” at [humanepro.org/RTOstrategies](https://humanepro.org/RTOstrategies).

Be mindful that expensive reclaim fees and other requirements may prohibit community members from being able to get their dog back, which can cause unnecessary stress for both the pet and the person. Having a flexible policy that allows fees to be waived if owners have corrected the issue that allowed the dog to get loose can help reunite pets and their families.

(Note: Attempting to control free-roaming cats with the same type of leash laws developed for loose dogs hasn't proven to be effective; Humane World for Animals recommends that the issue of cats at large be addressed separately from policies for dogs. See Chapter 5 for more on cat-specific policies.)



- Do your policies apply equally to all dogs regardless of their breed?
- Does your policy prioritize strategies to return lost pets home rather than leaning on punitive measures?
- Does your policy allow officers to choose the best approach, based on the circumstances, in cases involving at-large animals, enabling officers to foster strong, trust-based relationships with the community?
- Does your policy reduce barriers to reunification?
- Does your policy address at-large cats separately from at-large dogs?

**Chaining/tethering laws:** Intensive confinement or long-term restraint can severely damage a dog's physical and psychological well-being. Dogs are naturally social animals who need exercise and adequate interaction with people and/or other animals.

It's common for continuously tethered dogs to endure physical ailments and become overly territorial in their confined living space. Dogs feel naturally protective of their territory; when confronted with a perceived threat, they may respond according to their fight-or-flight instinct. A tied dog is more vulnerable, and because they're unable to retreat, they may be more likely to show aggressive behaviors when an unfamiliar animal or person wanders into their territory.

While Humane World supports efforts to prevent the continuous tethering of dogs, we recognize that people tether their dogs for a variety of reasons, including well-intentioned efforts to comply with leash laws, to keep their dogs from running off, as a response to behavioral challenges in the home or to comply with pet restrictions where they live. It's important for animal services officers to talk with owners and learn their reasons for tethering so that appropriate support can be provided.

For example, if the dog is an escape artist, perhaps repairing a fence and offering spay/neuter services will eliminate the tether permanently. If the landlord prohibits the dog from living indoors, talk with the landlord about the implications of this policy. If an owner is struggling with a behavioral challenge, such as housetraining, connect them with free or low-cost behavior services to work toward bringing the dog back inside.

To achieve the goal of fewer tethered dogs in a community, it's crucial to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges people may be facing and identify remedies that address the core issue rather than relying solely on punitive responses. When engaged with respect and dignity, people are more likely to spread the word to others that there are resources available to help them avoid tethering their dogs.

If your community is considering a tethering ordinance, remember that there's no one-size-fits-all policy. The proposed legislation must be a good fit for the community, given available resources and realistic prospects for enforcement.

- Does your policy outline realistic enforcement mechanisms?
- Does your policy provide assistance for behavioral support, fences or other pet owner support?

**Breed-specific legislation:** Humane World opposes laws and ordinances that prohibit dog ownership or regulate dog management based on breed, type or size (which is often used as a proxy for breed).

Extensive research shows that BSL doesn't improve public safety or reduce dog bite injuries. By focusing on a dog's appearance rather than behavior, BSL diverts resources away from proven safety measures such as enforcing leash laws, holding owners accountable for their pet's behavior and educating the public. Breed-specific laws and regulations are subjective, costly and difficult to enforce.

Municipalities with breed bans create a patchwork of competing laws and regulations across the state. Those jurisdictional variations leave residents confused and make enforcement difficult. Additionally, the method often employed to identify a dog's breed, visual identification, is majorly flawed. Studies have found that physical appearance doesn't strongly predict behavior and even experienced dog professionals are much more likely to be wrong than right when they attempt to identify dogs' breed ancestry simply by the dogs' looks.

Beyond being ineffective and impractical, breed-specific policies are inequitable. They disproportionately affect marginalized communities. These biases are carried into enforcement, deepening existing disparities.

Breed bans are based on the false assumption that breed is predictive of whether a dog may be dangerous. Experts consistently agree that no breed is more likely to bite than another. Furthermore, purebred dogs aren't clones; while the dogs may look alike, only a tiny portion of their genome determines a dog's breed-defining physical traits.



FROM LEFT: MEREDITH LEE/HUMANE WORLD FOR ANIMALS; AMANDA FOUNDATION.ORG/GETTY IMAGES

Dogs are individuals, and bite risk is more reliably determined by factors such as the individual dog's history, behavior and general size; the number of dogs involved; and the vulnerability of the person bitten.

No data supports the effectiveness of breed-specific policies, and no jurisdiction with breed-specific policies has been able to demonstrate an increase in public safety. Additionally, various state and federal protections require exceptions for service and assistance animals, making it impossible to "legislate away" a breed or type of dog.

Your policy should be breed-neutral and not include any breed-specific language. See "All dogs are equal" at [humaneworld.org/breed-discrimination](http://humaneworld.org/breed-discrimination) for more information, and explore our *Repealing Breed-Specific Legislation* toolkit at [humanepro.org/BSLtoolkit](http://humanepro.org/BSLtoolkit).

- Do your policies apply equally to all dogs, regardless of their breed or perceived breed?

**Dangerous dogs:** Dangerous dog policies are complex. It's important to craft them carefully to ensure they're effective, humane, equitable and enforceable.

Keep in mind that no law can prevent all dog bites. Dangerous dog laws can help prevent recurrences after a bite incident, but they're not a deterrent, and most people don't know such laws exist until they're involved in an incident.

The best way to prevent dog bites is with proactive services that ensure all dog owners have access to veterinary care, spay/neuter resources, dog training and socialization, proper confinement and similar services. Note that "access," in this case, refers not only to funds but to nonmonetary resources, such as transportation, carriers, leashes, pharmacies, pet services, etc. (See Chapter 2 for more on access to care.)

With the stakes so high, it's critical to create a breed-neutral process that provides a roadmap for a court of law to determine whether a dog should be declared dangerous or potentially dangerous without unnecessarily removing dogs from their homes.

Requirements for dogs declared dangerous shouldn't be overly harsh and should still allow dogs to be dogs (e.g., no excessive use of a muzzle or using harmful restraints). For dogs with a bite history, we recommend policies that require them to be altered, to have access to behavioral support through a certified dog-training professional, and to be appropriately managed so as to avoid the situation in which they're at risk of another bite.

The best way to prevent dog bites is through proactive outreach across your community. Communities should examine the strength and reach of basic policies, such as leash and proper restraint laws; create a funding stream to ensure that spay/neuter resources are readily available; and create programs that reduce the occurrence of dogs being tethered.



- Does your policy outline a process to declare dogs dangerous?
- Does the system account for the context of the behavior (provocation, pain, fear, or defense of territory, offspring or their owner, etc.)?
- Does your policy include fair and transparent due process?
- Does your policy outline fair and appropriate restrictions or requirements placed on dogs declared dangerous?
- Does your policy remain breed-neutral?

**Dog licensing:** Licensing dogs is one of the oldest pet-keeping policies in existence, dating back over a hundred years, and is deserving of review to ensure this approach meets present-day goals. Many cities and towns require owners to license their dogs as a way to identify lost dogs, ensure dogs are up-to-date on rabies vaccines and generate revenue for the municipality. Unfortunately, compliance rates remain very low across the United States; according to a recent estimate by DocuPet, only 13%-14% of owners license their dogs.

Despite decades of enforcement and administrative costs, dog licensing hasn't been successful. Humane World recommends that cities and towns instead focus on ensuring all dogs have access to no-cost or low-cost rabies vaccines, pet tags and collars, and microchipping.

In places where dog licensing is still in practice, it shouldn't be used as a punitive measure against pet owners or to separate pets from their families simply because of noncompliance. Dog licensing also shouldn't be used to penalize those who don't have access to spay/neuter surgeries. Differential licensing in which altered pets are much less expensive to license than unaltered

ones should be made equitable or eliminated entirely.

Several communities, including Austin, Texas, and Durham, North Carolina, have done away with dog licensing without any negative impacts. Think about what other approaches may help reunite lost dogs with their families and ensure access to vaccinations, and don't be afraid to try different models.

- Does your licensing policy prioritize reuniting pets with their owners and, if not, is there a better way to achieve that goal?
- Does your policy avoid overly punitive measures for owners unable to comply with the licensing requirement?
- Is your policy equitable to all dog owners?
- Have you reviewed compliance rates to determine if your existing policy is effective and what it costs to operate your licensing system?
- Is the revenue received from licensing or other fees used to fund other animal-management initiatives for the community, or are the funds used to administer the dog licensing program itself?
- Are there other ways to fund your services and programs?

**Hold periods for lost pets:** See the discussion of hold periods in Chapter 9.





## Chapter 5

# Cat-friendly communities

**Policies affecting cats need to consider both owned cats and community cats**—stray, feral or otherwise free-roaming cats who live primarily outside. Managing community cat populations at a municipal level is complex and often requires balancing the needs of the cats, the people who care about them, and the people and animals (including wildlife) who share the environment in which the cats live.

Cat policies should be designed to protect cats, safeguard public health and safety, and provide animal care and control agencies with effective, proactive and humane tools to best manage both owned and unowned cat populations. Humane World for Animals recommends local cat policies that promote a sustainable reduction in community cat populations rather than policies that attempt to preempt nuisance issues through punitive measures.

**Community cat terminology:** Definitions can provide a strong foundation for community cat laws. Humane World recommends using the term “community cat” as an umbrella term for the

spectrum of unowned feral and stray cats, regardless of their level of sociability, and avoiding the term “feral cat” in your ordinance. Community cats and owned cats are all “domestic” or “domesticated” cats, and definitions that imply feral cats are “wild” or “non-domesticated” are inaccurate and potentially dangerous, as domestic animals are typically afforded greater legal protections. A community cat can be defined as “any cat or kitten that has no apparent owner or identification and is free-roaming” (Louisville-Jefferson County, Kentucky, metro government).

Definitions of “owner” that place full legal responsibility for community cats on their caretakers are ineffective in reducing populations of free-roaming cats, as are laws that declare a person the owner of a cat after feeding the cat for a certain number of days. Instead, policies should exempt community cat caretakers from the definition of owner and/or create a separate definition for community cat caretakers to clarify they’re not the same as owners.

TNR should always stand for “trap-neuter-return” (avoid using the less accurate “release”), and the definition should include

returning a cat to the same location where the cat was found. TNR definitions should also clarify that, along with sterilization, cats are also vaccinated against rabies (where appropriate).

**Trap-neuter-return:** TNR is the cornerstone of effective community cat management. The goal of TNR is to humanely reduce, and eventually eliminate, the number of community cats in the area where TNR is performed. Added benefits include a reduction in nuisance behaviors, less wildlife predation and fewer public health concerns, along with a decline in shelter intake and euthanasia.

For TNR to be most effective in population management, a high proportion of the cats in any given area need to be sterilized. Policies should therefore name TNR as the preferred management method and encourage residents to participate in TNR efforts.

TNR may be legal in areas where there are no barriers to it in the ordinance, although explicitly allowing it under the law can set the tone for a cat-friendly community. We recommend that government agencies commit to fully legalizing nonlethal community cat management tools to ensure that future leaders of municipal management and animal care and control agencies continue to use them.



**Return-to-field:** Your ordinance should allow animal care and control agencies to use a range of tools for managing community cats and to directly participate in humane population management efforts. Agencies should have clear authorization to implement return-to-field (also known as shelter-neuter-return) programs.

Return-to-field differs from TNR in that the animal shelter is making the decision to return the cat after the cat is brought to their facility. Laws shouldn't limit outcome options for cats and can specifically authorize animal care and control officers to return cats to the location they were found after they have been sterilized.

For a more detailed look at policies that do and don't work for managing community cats, see *Managing Community Cats: A Guide for Municipal Leaders* at [humanepro.org/communitycatsguide](http://humanepro.org/communitycatsguide). To learn how to implement a return-to-field program, read our *Return-to-Field Handbook* at [humanepro.org/return-to-field](http://humanepro.org/return-to-field).

- Is your policy focused on humanely reducing the unowned cat population?
- Does your policy adequately differentiate between community cat caregivers and cat owners?
- Does your policy explicitly legalize TNR and allow for ongoing management of community cats?
- Does your policy enable return-to-field programs?
- Do your stray hold policies provide shelters leeway to quickly move cats out of the shelter? (See Chapter 9.)

**Caretaker or colony registration:** Humane World advises against implementing overly restrictive caregiver and TNR-related language. In the early days of TNR, municipalities often prescribed how, when and what could be done, including registration systems for caretakers, strict guidelines for how many cats could be in a colony, and other requirements for people caring for unowned cats.

This attempt at oversight often backfired, discouraging residents from participating in TNR and shifting the focus from reducing the community cat population to micromanaging the actions of volunteers. Using permissive and flexible language that supports nonlethal approaches and encourages community engagement is best, especially when a municipality is relying on residents to manage the cat population at their own expense.

**Feeding bans:** Prohibitions on feeding community cats or feeding any cat outdoors are often enacted in response to conflicts between those feeding cats and others who live or work nearby. These laws are ineffective as they don't address the core issue—a growing cat population—and are often ignored by compassionate residents. Conflicts can be addressed through education and modifying feeding practices, such as where and when the cats



are fed. For more information, see *An Advocate's Guide to Fighting Community Cat Feeding Bans* at [humanepro.org/catfeedingbans](http://humanepro.org/catfeedingbans).

**Leash laws/running at large:** Cats are often included alongside dogs in leash laws that prohibit animals from running at large. Attempting to control free-roaming cats with the same type of leash laws developed for dogs hasn't proven to be effective. Aside from being difficult to enforce, anti-roaming laws for cats can interfere with efforts to actively manage community cats. TNR programs can't be implemented if it's illegal for those cats to continue to live outdoors once they're returned.

Some communities attempt to strike a balance by permitting sterilized community cats to roam, while owned cats must be confined. Ideally, owned cats should be kept indoors and allowed out only when contained in a catio (enclosed cat patio) or on a leash. However, impounding healthy, free-roaming cats is time-consuming and a drain on resources, and it ultimately doesn't contribute to a long-term cat management plan.

**Abandonment:** As discussed in Chapter 1, abandonment laws should be written so that returning cats to the location they were found, as part of a community cat program, isn't considered to be abandonment.

**Cat licensing:** Cat licensing is generally not the best use of municipal resources. It's time-consuming, opposed by many

owners, difficult to enforce, and not effective in reuniting lost cats with their owners or ensuring cats are vaccinated against rabies. Humane World instead recommends ensuring access to rabies vaccinations, collars and identification tags, and microchips. If your goal with licensing is to raise funds for your programs, consider that compliance with cat licensing laws is estimated to be around 7%.

- Does your policy avoid placing unrealistic restrictions on cats and their caretakers or owners?
- Does your policy support those performing TNR, including exempting their actions from abandonment laws?

**Cat declawing:** In addition to general anti-cruelty laws, communities can increase protections for cats by banning the practice of declawing. This once common procedure involves amputating the last bone on each toe and is now considered inhumane, with long-term adverse impacts to cat welfare. A growing number of state and local laws prohibit the practice of declawing, unless there's a medical reason such as a nail bed tumor.

For more information, see our *Advocate's Guide to Ending Cat Declawing* toolkit at [humanepro.org/end-cat-declawing](http://humanepro.org/end-cat-declawing).

- Does your ordinance go the extra step and ban cat declawing?

**Stray holds:** See the discussion of hold periods in Chapter 9.



Humane World  
for Animals

## Chapter 6

# Veterinary care

### Across the U.S., communities face a growing crisis

of limited access to veterinary resources. For low-income families, the challenges involved in accessing basic pet wellness services can be especially acute. Systemic barriers, such as cost, transportation, geographic, as well as work and time barriers, leave many families unable to secure even routine preventative care for their pets.

Through our Pets for Life program, Humane World for Animals has found that in underserved areas, 70% of pets have never seen a veterinarian before engaging with the program and 85% of pets are unaltered. These numbers reflect barriers to accessing veterinary services, not disinterest. When those barriers are removed, the vast majority of people readily use the veterinary services offered.

Municipalities should ensure that local policies don't create unnecessary obstacles to veterinary care, such as by limiting the types of services animal shelters or nonprofit veterinary clinics can offer their community. Policies should support a patient-centered approach that provides veterinary professionals greater flexibility in diagnostics and treatment based on the circumstances of both the pet and the owner.

**Means testing:** Requiring people to provide proof of income to qualify for subsidized services can be counterproductive to increasing veterinary care access. It can be demoralizing for people seeking services, create a negative power dynamic, and result in missing people who don't meet the requirements but still can't access veterinary care. Providing financial proof of need can be particularly burdensome for individuals and communities experiencing poverty, where day-to-day life often involves irregular work, unstable income and the constant challenge of meeting basic needs.

According to our recent estimates, between 19-20 million pets in the U.S. live in households experiencing poverty (defined as a family of four earning up to \$31,200 annually in 2025). Millions more pets live with families that hover just above this threshold. Setting an arbitrary income limit for services can deny veterinary care to countless people and pets.

Moreover, requiring means testing to determine patient eligibility places an undue administrative burden on financially strapped nonprofit services.

Instead of including means testing in ordinances, we recommend that service providers be allowed to set their own parameters. For example, they may conduct a community assessment and target geographic areas based on poverty levels and lack of services, or they may allow for a universal self-attestation of need by families requesting veterinary care.

**Nonprofit capabilities:** Humane World supports expanding nonprofit capabilities to meet community needs. Some states or municipalities restrict animal shelters and nonprofit organizations from providing veterinary services for privately owned animals who aren't in the custody or ownership of an animal shelter. These laws create barriers to veterinary care for owned animals and community cats, particularly in underserved communities where affordable options are scarce.

By removing these types of restrictions, municipalities can empower animal shelters and nonprofit organizations to provide veterinary care to a wider range of clients who may otherwise go without. Expanding nonprofit capabilities not only promotes animal health and welfare but also strengthens communities by reducing shelter intake, protecting human health and keeping pets with their families.

Learn more about Humane World's access to care programs at [humaneworld.org/accesstocare](https://humaneworld.org/accesstocare).

- Does your policy avoid creating unnecessary barriers to veterinary care?
- Does your policy avoid requiring individuals to demonstrate financial need in order to access veterinary care for their pets?
- Does your policy include funding to provide care to pets in your community?
- Does your policy avoid placing burdensome requirements on providers of low-cost veterinary services?



## Chapter 7

# Spay/neuter

### Spaying and neutering are important components

of any comprehensive plan to improve the overall health of animals in a community, reduce unplanned litters and support the well-being of individual animals. Programs and policies that expand access to veterinary care are critical to making spay/neuter services available to all pet owners. In contrast, legal mandates don't improve access to veterinary resources or increase the financial capacity of pet owners or caretakers.

Humane World for Animals does not support laws that rely on punitive or compulsory measures to regulate pet sterilization. Punitive approaches can lead to negative financial consequences, such as fines for noncompliance due to the owners' inability to afford veterinary care, as well as stress and emotional trauma for both animals and people when pets are separated from their families.

The most effective method to increase sterilization rates is by removing the numerous barriers to veterinary care that many pet owners and caretakers face. We recommend that policymakers develop infrastructure to promote sterilization procedures by ensuring community members have access to affordable spay/neuter services.

Nationally, about 91% of pets are sterilized, yet in underserved neighborhoods, approximately 85% of pets are unaltered. Data collected from our Pets for Life program shows that when people in underserved communities are provided access to spay/neuter resources (such as cost assistance and transportation), the

percentage of altered pets in the community skyrockets to 89%—nearly identical to the national rate.

This shows that most pet owners aren't opposed to altering their pets. The reason for high unaltered rates is access. The same is true for community cat caretakers.

For more information on our Pets for Life program, visit [humanepro.org/pets-for-life](http://humanepro.org/pets-for-life).

- Does your policy avoid burdensome requirements on pet owners who don't have the resources to comply?
- Does your policy remain breed-neutral?
- Are there support services in place to reach community goals?



**Spay/neuter funding:** Humane World supports state and local legislative efforts to create sustainable funding streams for spay/neuter programs. Cost is a common barrier to spay/neuter services, and many states have enacted creative programs to subsidize spay/neuter for pet owners and community cat caregivers.

While every state is different, the general framework is a sustained funding mechanism in collaboration with a grant-making program to participating nonprofit or private practice clinics that provide low-cost or free spay/neuter services.

Examples of funding programs include the sale of special state license plates, tax check-off programs, allocation of funding in a state or local budget, and surcharges on companies selling pet food in the state. Funding programs should include trap-neuter-return programs for unowned community cats, as targeting this population can have a significant impact on shelter intake (particularly of kittens), cat populations and communities as a whole.

Increasing access to spay/neuter isn't just about cost, however. Having enough trained professionals to provide the service is critical, and incentives for veterinarians and veterinary technicians to provide services in underserved communities or at animal shelters can be an important part of increasing sterilization rates.

We strongly recommend that any new efforts to create a

publicly funded spay/neuter subsidy also include strategies to remove other barriers to veterinary care such as transportation services, language assistance, and recruitment and retention of veterinary professionals.

Note that spay/neuter laws should refrain from describing sterilization as limited to a surgical procedure. Researchers are working to develop nonsurgical sterilization technologies with the goal of enabling permanent sterilization with a single injection. Eliminating barriers to nonsurgical sterilization now will avoid the need to go back and make changes once the products are available.

For more on spay/neuter resources, visit [humanepro.org/topics/spayneuter](https://humanepro.org/topics/spayneuter).

- Does your policy provide resources for pet owners to overcome barriers to accessing spay/neuter services?
- Does your policy address systemic issues such as cost of veterinary care and the availability of veterinary professionals?
- Does your policy allow for resources to be allocated toward TNR/community cat management efforts?
- Does your policy refrain from describing sterilization as a surgical procedure?



## Chapter 8

# Pet-inclusive housing

**Across the country,** communities are grappling with the rising cost of housing. The wide-ranging impacts of this crisis underscore the importance of policies that promote affordable and pet-inclusive housing in your community.

While the rental housing market is generally trending toward more pet-friendly policies, affordable and available rental housing that welcomes pets without breed, size or other restrictions remains limited. Despite growing demand, many tenants struggle to find housing that accepts their entire family, beloved companion animals included.

Anecdotal evidence and shelter data both point to housing and landlord-related issues as leading reasons for involuntary pet relinquishment. Research has found that higher rates of relinquishment exist in socially vulnerable communities, particularly among lower-income households, people experiencing housing insecurity and those with limited access to resources. These families are more likely to face the painful decision of surrendering a pet simply because they can't find housing that allows them to stay together.

Moreover, research has found that pet restrictions and fees disproportionately burden lower-income tenants (who are more likely to have experienced at least one pet restriction in their housing) and people of color, further exacerbating existing systemic inequalities in housing access and stability.

**No arbitrary policies:** Humane World for Animals supports policies that help keep pets in their homes and encourage housing providers and operators to view pets as members of the family. Traditional “pet-friendly” housing policies often include arbitrary criteria that exclude the majority of pets. These outdated, unnecessary pet policies rely on old stereotypes that have long been disproven and can be applied inequitably. These



onerous pet restrictions cost many families their beloved pets and strain an already overburdened shelter system, diverting scarce resources from animals who are truly in need of a new home.

Additionally, federal protections available to individuals living with a disability prohibit landlords from excluding a dog based solely on their breed. With one in five Americans living with a disability, many households may be eligible for fair housing accommodations. Because dogs of all breeds and sizes must be accommodated, it's easier and less risky for housing managers to adopt practical, breed-neutral pet policies from the start.

Learn more about proactive approaches to landlord-tenant issues involving pets and how to make a positive change in your community with our *Pets Are Welcome* advocacy guide at [humanepro.org/pawadvocateguide](https://humanepro.org/pawadvocateguide).

**Limiting pet-related fees:** Pet fees are a barrier for renters with pets, often taking the form of nonrefundable charges, monthly “pet rent” and additional deposits. These costs can add up quickly, creating significant upfront and ongoing financial burdens that fall hardest on lower-income tenants.

According to a 2021 report by the Pet-Inclusive Housing Initiative, pet-owning renters pay an average of \$864 in combined deposits, \$244 in one-time pet fees and \$600 annually in pet rent. While property owners have a right to protect their investments, the same report found that only 9% of pets cause any damage, and in most cases, a standard security deposit is sufficient to cover repair costs.

Pet fees are rarely linked to actual damages or risk. Instead, they’re often used as a revenue stream, disproportionately affecting low-income and marginalized renters and contributing to housing instability. A more equitable approach would prioritize reasonable, refundable deposits rather than recurring or nonrefundable pet fees.

**Pet policy transparency:** Renters with pets often struggle to find suitable housing due to the lack of clear, accessible information about pet policies. Listings are frequently vague or incomplete, forcing renters to spend considerable time contacting landlords or property managers to determine whether pets are allowed and under what conditions.

This issue is especially pronounced in subsidized housing, where pet policies are rarely published online. A recent study emphasized the importance of written pet policies that are publicly accessible, noting that inconsistent or poorly defined

policies often lead to confusion and frustration, which makes it more difficult for pet-owning tenants to secure stable housing that accommodates their entire household. Transparent, publicly posted pet policies help both tenants and landlords set clear expectations and understand their responsibilities.

**No selective enforcement or harmful policies:** Humane World also recommends implementing policies that protect tenants from selective enforcement of pet rules as well as protect pets from policies that are physically harmful. For example, New York City has enacted what is essentially a waiver of any “no pets” clause in a lease if a tenant openly keeps a pet for at least three months and the landlord doesn’t commence a legal proceeding to enforce the “no pets” clause.

In addition, while public housing agencies are prohibited from requiring that tenants “debark” their dogs (have their vocal cords removed) or declaw their cats, we encourage municipalities and states to prohibit all housing operators from requiring these harmful practices as a condition of tenancy. Both procedures are inhumane and ineffective in resolving the problem, as they often cause significant behavior and medical problems for the animal. California, Rhode Island and Minnesota have enacted statewide laws prohibiting landlords from requiring declawing or debarking, and Delaware prohibits landlords from requiring declawing.

With greater housing stability, we can expect a reduction in pet relinquishment. Reducing barriers to housing will help keep families intact, improve landlord-tenant relationships, reduce the risk of people and pets becoming displaced, and save shelters space and money caring for pets who could otherwise have stayed with their loving owners.

- Does your policy prevent housing operators from implementing breed or size restrictions?
- Does your policy restrict or cap pet-related fees in rental housing?
- Does your policy protect tenants from selective enforcement of “no pets” rules by property managers and ensure pet policies are transparent and accessible to prospective tenants?
- Does your policy protect pets from inhumane, painful and ineffective procedures such as debarking and declawing?



## Chapter 9

# Animal shelters and rescue groups

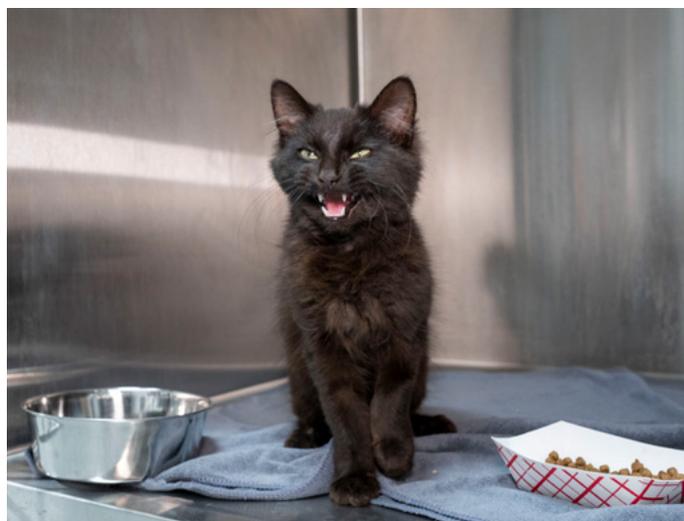
**While every shelter and rescue group operates independently**, there are established best practices available to help agencies and organizations ensure that they're conducting their operations in the most humane and effective manner possible. The Association of Shelter Veterinarians' *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* is the industry standard for organizations of all sizes. These standards fall into four categories:

- **Unacceptable:** indicates practices that need to be avoided or prevented without exception
- **Must:** indicates practices for which adherence is necessary to ensure humane care
- **Should:** indicates practices that are strongly recommended and compliance is expected in most circumstances
- **Ideal:** indicates practices that are implemented when resources allow

This format allows organizations to identify areas that must be remedied (through additional funding and staff, intake prevention strategies, community engagement or other means) and lays out a framework by which organizations can continue to improve. If state or local laws are drafted to regulate shelters and rescues, they must be informed by the most up-to-date version of these industry standards and include funding to ensure the humane care of animals at these organizations.

If regulations are created for shelters and rescues, Humane World for Animals recommends that they be legislated at the state level to create consistency and that laws governing nonprofit and municipal organizations not be more stringent than those regulating pet stores and commercial breeders.

Regulations must use clear language relevant to shelter and rescue operations; focus on the organization and not the individuals working, volunteering or fostering for the agency; and have a clear appeal process. If inspections are required, they should have clear goals, and organizations should be aware of what's expected. We recommend that the overseeing



agency develop written guidelines based on the law and provide educational opportunities for organizations to seek clarity.

Foster homes are a critical resource for shelters and rescues. Foster families temporarily care for all kinds of pets, including those awaiting adoption and owned pets whose families need temporary assistance. Foster programs can reduce disease in shelters by decreasing the overall population in a facility and reducing the stress of individual animals by moving them to a home environment.

Temporary homes also provide essential behavioral support and socialization that a brick-and-mortar shelter is unable to replicate fully. Shelters and rescues should have clear protocols and standards of care for their foster homes and provide training, supplies and support to enable foster families to meet these standards.

If a state requires inspections of shelters and rescues, these shouldn't be interpreted as allowing the state or municipality to enter private homes as an extension of the shelter or rescue. Rather, organizations are responsible for ensuring standards of care within foster homes.

Lastly, funding for oversight must be included in shelter and rescue regulations and not placed solely on the financial backs of the organizations themselves.

- Does your policy incorporate best practices from the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' guidelines?
- Does your policy provide sustainable funding to fully staff and resource your municipal or county shelter?
- Does your policy regulate the organizations and not the individuals working, volunteering or fostering for them?
- Does your policy have unreasonable fees that shelters and rescues must pay to fund the oversight?
- Does your policy also require the same standards of care for pet stores and commercial breeders?

**Humane euthanasia:** When shelters face the difficult decision to euthanize an animal due to a significant and untreatable medical or behavioral diagnosis or because the capacity of the organization can no longer meet the animals' needs as described in the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters*, it's incumbent upon organizations to ensure that the death is as humane as possible. Humane World and all other national animal welfare organizations agree that direct injection of approved euthanasia drugs (referred to as "euthanasia by injection"), by which the animal quickly loses consciousness without experiencing pain or distress, is the most humane euthanasia method currently available.

Lesser alternatives, such as carbon monoxide (CO) or carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) gas chambers, which can virtually never provide a stress- and pain-free death, must never be used in shelter settings. For more on our work to end gas chambers, visit [humaneworld.org/en/issues/ending-gas-chamber-use](http://humaneworld.org/en/issues/ending-gas-chamber-use).

- Does your policy ban the use of gas chambers (both CO and CO<sub>2</sub>) as a form of euthanasia?
- Does your policy provide funding to train staff on proper euthanasia-by-injection protocols?
- Does your policy ensure access to the necessary drugs by the appropriate shelter and rescue personnel in order to provide a humane death?

**Spay/neuter prior to adoption:** According to 2025 Shelter Animals Count data, between 70%-75% of cats and dogs arrive at animal shelters and rescues unaltered (meaning they haven't been spayed or neutered). The ability of organizations to spay or neuter pets prior to adoption or transfer to a new owner can have a significant impact on reducing pet overpopulation over time.

Whenever possible, we strongly encourage organizations to provide this service, but we recognize that shelters face similar access to veterinary care challenges as their community

members. If policies are enacted to require spay or neuter prior to adoption, they must come with funding and veterinary capacity to meet the need.

When the availability of spay/neuter appointments is limited or there are long wait times, we recommend allowing low-risk animals to go home with adopters under a "foster to adopt" agreement by which the shelter maintains legal ownership until the pet can be spayed or neutered. We don't recommend housing animals at a shelter until an appointment can be secured unless surgery can occur in a timely fashion.

- Does your policy have flexibility so that animals can move into loving homes while awaiting spay/neuter surgery?
- Does your policy include a sustainable funding stream for spay/neuter at your local shelter?

**Data keeping and reporting:** Data should drive policy decisions. Data collected by animal shelters about the animals who require the temporary care of a shelter or rescue is representative of broader community barriers to pet care. Tracking the number of animals entering shelters can help determine funding needs, while data on the reasons animals are entering organizations can help guide program development to keep more pets with their original families.

Shelter Animals Count is the trusted source for shelter data, and organizations can contribute their data automatically and for free. They can use Shelter Animals Count to create organization-specific reports to inform their operations and any policy changes.

For example, if lost pets make up 61% of the total animals who enter a shelter, a focus on removing barriers for owners to reclaim their pets and funding for programs that keep pets at home should be a focus. If most cats entering a shelter are kittens born to cats who live outside, funding can be allocated to trap-neuter-return programs to address the root cause.

Any data reporting requirements should remove identifying information of the people served by the shelter, and data shouldn't be used to penalize, defund or publicly shame shelters. Instead, an organization's challenges should be reviewed within the broader context of community challenges and funding limitations.

Learn more about how to advocate for resources for your local shelter at [humanepro.org/shelter-concerns](http://humanepro.org/shelter-concerns).

- Does your policy require that shelters and rescue groups report their data to state or local officials?
- Do your data reporting requirements match industry standards according to Shelter Animals Count?
- Does this data collection inform all other related policies?
- Does your policy require the same reporting of pet stores and commercial breeders as it does for shelters and rescues?



**Lost and found pets.** Humane World supports policies that allow pet owners the best chances of being reunited with their pets while also preventing unnecessary time in a shelter environment for animals who are unlikely to be reclaimed. According to a 2025 report from Shelter Animals Count, the most trusted source of shelter data, only 16% of lost dogs and 4% of lost cats who entered a shelter were reunited with their owners. This data mirrors decades of low reunification rates for shelter animals.

In addition, according to findings from Human Animal Support Services, 60% of lost dogs who were reunited with their owner after entering a shelter were picked up less than 1 mile from home. Another study showed that 50% of lost cats were found within 50 meters of their home and 75% of lost cats were found within 500 meters. When animals go missing, they usually don't go far, and communities play a key role in getting them home.

Because lost pets are less likely to be reunited with their families if they enter a shelter, we support policies that aim to reunite pets with their families in the area in which they were found. Lost pet policies shouldn't automatically compel community members to turn over found animals to shelters or animal control centers. Instead, enabling finders to submit found-animal reports while using their own community networks to reunite lost animals with their owners reduces the costs to shelters to take in and house lost pets and dramatically increases reunification rates. Policies should also allow law enforcement officers to scan free-roaming pets for a microchip or identify an owner through an ID tag and reunite the animal with their family without issuing a citation.

- Does your policy allow community members to use their own resources to reunite lost animals with their owners?

**Hold periods:** Communities should consider making a distinction between hold periods designed to move animals more quickly toward lifesaving outcomes (such as return-to-field programs and adoptions) and those for animals who are more likely to be reunited with their families (such as animals who arrive with a microchip or ID tag).

Hold periods were established to provide owners an opportunity to reclaim lost pets; however, even with stray hold periods, the reclaim rate for cats in shelters across the country averages at under 4% year over year. Most cats who are reunited with their families have microchips or identification tags. Research has shown cats are more likely to return home if they don't go to the shelter. For cats with no indication of ownership, a return-to-field approach (see Chapter 5) may be the quickest way to get them back home.

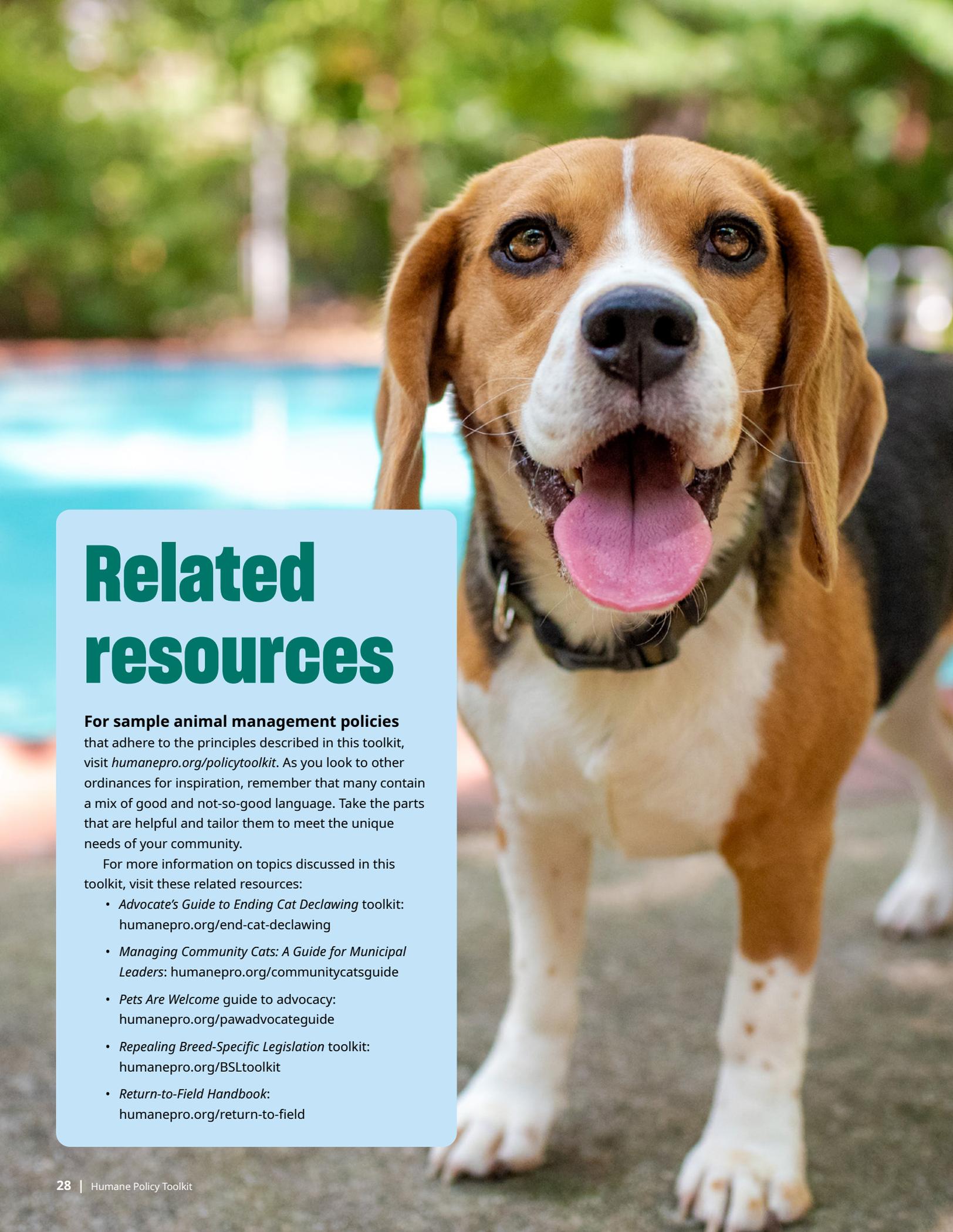
Humane World recommends eliminating or reducing stray hold periods for healthy stray cats without any form of identification and already ear-tipped cats so that those cats can be vetted and returned to where they were found without delay. Consider also allowing litters of age-appropriate kittens (those old enough to be adopted) to bypass stray holds and be placed for adoption immediately. It's highly unlikely that someone will claim them as lost pets, and reducing the time they spend in the shelter is a benefit to all. Policies should also allow for finders to be drafted as official or unofficial foster caretakers for kittens who aren't old enough for adoption, without being required to turn them over to the shelter for a stray hold.

- Does your policy establish hold periods based on community data that maximizes reuniting lost pets with their families and other lifesaving outcomes?
- Does your policy distinguish between cats best served through TNR and return-to-field programs and owned pets?
- Do your stray hold policies provide shelters leeway to quickly move cats out of the shelter?

**Pound seizure:** Pound seizure is the practice of using shelter animals for research purposes. Humane World strongly opposes pound seizure except under a very narrow set of circumstances in which the animals aren't harmed, the results directly benefit the animals and they're ultimately adopted into loving homes.

Animal shelters can't operate effectively without the confidence of the communities they serve and must be seen by the public as a safe haven for animals in need. The relinquishment of impounded companion animals from public and private shelters to facilities that use live animals for research, testing or educational purposes is a betrayal of public trust and the implicit contract established between humans and companion animals.

Learn more about Humane World's position on pound seizure at [humaneworld.org/en/issues/animals-used-experiments-faq](https://humaneworld.org/en/issues/animals-used-experiments-faq).



# Related resources

**For sample animal management policies** that adhere to the principles described in this toolkit, visit [humanepro.org/policytoolkit](https://humanepro.org/policytoolkit). As you look to other ordinances for inspiration, remember that many contain a mix of good and not-so-good language. Take the parts that are helpful and tailor them to meet the unique needs of your community.

For more information on topics discussed in this toolkit, visit these related resources:

- *Advocate's Guide to Ending Cat Declawing* toolkit: [humanepro.org/end-cat-declawing](https://humanepro.org/end-cat-declawing)
- *Managing Community Cats: A Guide for Municipal Leaders*: [humanepro.org/communitycatsguide](https://humanepro.org/communitycatsguide)
- *Pets Are Welcome* guide to advocacy: [humanepro.org/pawadvocateguide](https://humanepro.org/pawadvocateguide)
- *Repealing Breed-Specific Legislation* toolkit: [humanepro.org/BSLtoolkit](https://humanepro.org/BSLtoolkit)
- *Return-to-Field Handbook*: [humanepro.org/return-to-field](https://humanepro.org/return-to-field)

# Appendix A: Steps to pass a local ordinance

Sometimes the best way to help animals in your community is to pass a local ordinance. This can put in place a set of rules to protect animals and public safety, help resolve community issues, improve enforcement and expand resources for residents, and it may contribute to better state legislation.

However, there are often times when laws can't be used as a sole measure to address issues. It's critical for animal welfare advocates and animal care and service organizations to reach their communities with positive animal care messages and to provide accessible services to the public. Without those steps, legislation is unlikely to have any meaningful effect.

## 1. Learn the process

- The process for local legislation varies around the country, so get familiar with how things work in your community. An official or employee in your local government may be able to help you. You should also become familiar with any existing state laws on the subject.
- Attend a few meetings of the governing body you hope to influence. Listen to the kinds of questions public officials ask and the issues they take most seriously. By understanding their general concerns, you'll be able to craft your arguments accordingly.

## 2. Find a friend in office

- Public officials tend to take their constituents' interests seriously, so try talking to your own council member or alderperson first. As much as we'd like the people we vote for to agree with us, this may not always work. If your own council member isn't interested, don't despair. Try to find another official with an interest in animal issues and pitch

your idea to them. Often, your local animal care and control agency or nonprofit humane society can point you toward a sympathetic decision-maker.

## 3. Get community support

- Supporting a local ordinance means doing things such as testifying at council meetings, contacting council members to express support for the ordinance and informing others about the ordinance. Even in big cities, very few people tend to get involved in local government (which means a small group of people are changing laws and policies), so getting active community support can make or break the legislation you're trying to pass. A diverse coalition will show your elected officials that a significant portion of the community supports your efforts.

## 4. Draft the ordinance

- You may already know what you want your ordinance to say, but it will have to be crafted into an appropriate legislative format. If you write the ordinance yourself, someone from your local government may be able to help you by putting your ideas into the proper format. You may be able to find a sample law or proposed legislation in another locality that can serve as a model.

## 5. Prepare for opposition

- While every community is different, the odds are that someone in your area will oppose the ordinance. Be sure to prepare the sponsor of the ordinance with information about the opponent's concerns, along with the data, facts and talking points to address them, well in advance of the hearing.

## Appendix A: Steps to pass a local ordinance

- Creating a short fact sheet with common arguments and answers can be very helpful to your sponsor. Additionally, a letter to the leadership of a local opposition group soon after the issue is introduced can go a long way. It might help open lines of communication to discuss the issue or dispel the opposition's concerns.

### 6. Go public

- Local officials read local papers! Schedule a meeting with the editor or editorial board of your local paper to ask them to support your proposal. Contact other media outlets, including television and radio, to let them know about your efforts. Write letters to the editor of your local paper, remembering to state your case concisely (most papers prefer letters of 150-250 words).

### 7. Testify

- If your council calls a public meeting to discuss your proposal, you should testify alongside members of your coalition. Plan ahead to make sure that everyone doesn't speak on the exact same points (a common problem at public hearings). You may have limited time, so dividing talking points among a handful of speakers can ensure that all of your key arguments are heard.
- It's particularly helpful if you can get animal care and control officers to testify on behalf of their agencies. Enforcement professionals in uniform add an additional air of importance and mainstream acceptance to an issue. It's especially important to have an individual who will be enforcing the ordinance testify.

### 8. Compromise (if needed)

- As easy and straightforward as this all sounds, things may not run so smoothly. Whether because of enforcement issues or strong opposition, sometimes you may have to compromise on your ordinance. This is OK. Be prepared to compromise ahead of time. Know what parts of your ordinance are most important and which ones can be set aside if needed.

### 9. Regroup after defeat

- You may not win your battle the first time around, but don't give up. Maybe your council just wasn't ready for this particular issue at this time. Talk to those council members who voted against your bill and find out why. You can learn from this experience and try to pass a better bill in the future.

### 10. Celebrate victory, but remain vigilant

- You've accomplished something significant; be proud of all of your hard work. However, passing an ordinance is just one step in the process. The language may be revised by city or county attorneys, enforcement can vary over time, and future councils may attempt to amend or repeal the ordinance. In some cases, opponents may even challenge the law in court.
- Whatever the situation, stay engaged after passage of the ordinance. Monitor how the ordinance is implemented, watch for proposed changes, and be ready to speak up to ensure the law is carried out as intended.











# Our mission

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



**Humane  
World for  
Animals™**

[humaneworld.org](http://humaneworld.org)