

# The Go-To Guide for Animal Services

A Data-Driven Roadmap for Modern Animal Welfare Systems

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*#ThankstoMaddie*



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# The Go-To Guide for Animal Services

Animal services departments, whether housed within government or contracted to nonprofit partners, are often asked to solve complex social, public-health, and safety challenges with limited budgets, aging infrastructure, outdated ordinances, and intense public scrutiny.

Too often, local leaders inherit systems that were designed decades ago, systems built around reaction rather than prevention, shelter intake rather than community solutions and enforcement rather than support.

This guide was created for the people tasked with changing that and includes high level summaries of programming and processes along with resource links.

If you are a city or county manager, mayor, councilmember, budget officer, attorney, law enforcement, or department head responsible for animal control and/or sheltering, or a non-profit animal welfare organization with municipal responsibilities and contracts, these pages are meant to give you a concise, data-driven roadmap for building an animal welfare system that is fiscally responsible, operationally efficient, legally sound, and aligned with modern community expectations.

## History

Many people don't know the origin story of our field. Here is its history.

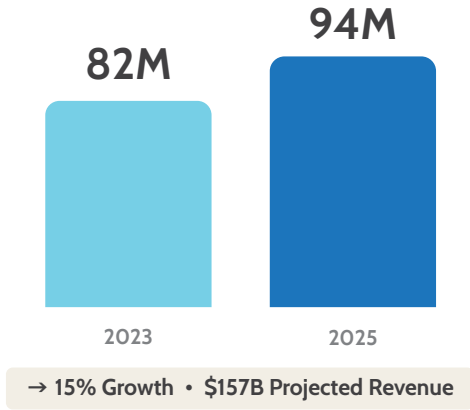
The mass confinement of dogs (and later cats) began in the later 1800s and early 1900s as a means to remove and exterminate dogs from the street who were considered dangerous or a rabies threat to people, however accurate or appropriate. Inhumane euthanasia remained the end result the majority of the time, and [the system](#) was based on the separation of pets from any people who were caring for them.

This [historical/traditional animal welfare system](#) is outdated and **does not serve the needs** of modern-day society and how we live with pets. **This guide is for municipal leaders, elected or appointed, who have the obligation to create an animal welfare system that is effective and efficient, provides for public and animal safety, and is committed to lifesaving.** Humane euthanasia should be reserved for large, community-unsafe dogs and medical cases (any species) beyond hope or resources.

# A Modern Perspective on the Role of Pets: Relevant National Facts/Data & Formulas

How important are pets in our society? Roughly half of all households have a dog or cat.

## Volume of People/Household with Pets



The [pet industry](#) is expected to have generated \$157 billion in 2025 as the pet owning population has [increased](#) from 82 million households in 2023 to 94 million in 2025.



**68M Households**



**49M Households**

Species Breakdown (2025)

In terms of species breakdown ([2025 data](#)): about 68 million U.S. households own a dog, and 49 million own a cat.

**How People Feel About Their Pets:** In a [2023 survey](#), more than half of pet owners (51%) said their pets are “as much a part of their family as a human member.” In that same survey, among all pet owners, 97% said their pets are part of their family.

The American Veterinary Medical Association [reports](#):

- 89.7 million pet dogs in US
- 74.1 million pet cats in US
- 163.8 million pet dogs and cats in the United States

According to 2025 data from [Shelter Animals Count](#):

- There are 4,100 brick and mortar shelters in the US and 9,371 non-profit rescue groups (no building).
- Shelter Intake 2025: 3 million cats and 2.8 million dogs, for a total of 5.8 million, approximately 2% fewer than in 2024.
- Since 2019, intake is continuing to decrease. Intake is not the problem.

From the [2023-2025 Shelter Animals Count Field Services Report](#):

## Field Services Categories

**Quality-of-Life:** Quality-of-Life issues relate to the impact animals have on their surroundings, such as excessive barking, roaming at large, not cleaning up feces, overpopulation, or deceased animals.

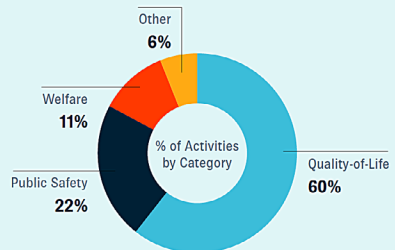
**Public Safety:** This category encompasses situations that may pose a risk to people or other animals, including aggressive behavior, bites or injuries, and animals deemed dangerous, potentially dangerous, or vicious.

**Welfare:** This category includes activities related to the physical and mental well-being of animals, such as welfare checks, tethered animals, suspected cruelty, abandonment, or neglect.

**Other:** The “Other” category includes activities that could not be classified within the three primary field services categories due to incomplete, inconclusive, or undefined data. Examples include records labeled “Assist – Null” or “Email – Null,” where the activity type was unspecified.

## Field Services by Category

The dataset shows the distribution of field services activities across the four NACA-defined categories:



*These percentages provide a high-level view of how field services activity is currently distributed. By studying these patterns, organizations can prioritize resources and better understand trends within their communities.*

Reference: [Shelter Animals Count and National Animal Control Association Report](#)

## What's Happening in YOUR Community?

Below are formulas to determine the number of pets in your community. Based on [AVMA statistics](#):

### Formula for pet ownership (dogs)

- 45.5% households own a dog x average 1.5 per household

### Example for County:

- Population is 100,000 households
- 45.5% is 45,500 households with dogs
- Average 1.8 dogs per household = 81,900 dogs

### Formula for pet ownership (cats)

- 32.1% households own a cat x average 1.8 per household

### Example for County:

- Population is 100,000 households
- 32.1% is 32,100 households with cats
- Average 1.8 cats per household = 57,780 cats

## Estimating the number of free roaming cats

- [🔗 The number of unaltered feral cats in a geographic area](#)
- [🔗 Outdoor cat population calculator](#)
- [🔗 Community cat calculator](#)

## Strategic Overarching Animal Welfare Goals

### Unified leadership:

(goal=most efficient animal welfare system) Over Field Services and Shelter Operations.

### Responsible public policy:

(goal=most efficient animal welfare system) Should be the framework to provide public and animal safety in tandem with a life-saving mission, minimize complaints and eliminate waste of resources.

### Strategic Community Programming:

(goal=proactive programming) Helps constituents, pet owners and pets in better ways than shelter intake, is more compassionate, is fiscally responsible because is preventive and reduces reactive costs/enforcement calls/shelter intake.

### Community-Minded Field Services:

(goal=most efficient animal welfare) Reserves enforcement actions for true perpetrators of cruelty/neglect/negligence, etc., reduces need for shelter intake, fiscally responsible because preventive/reduces reactive costs.

### **Managed Coordinated Intake:**

(goal=use finite shelter space as efficiently as possible) Means that shelter space is used for pets when all other better alternatives have been exhausted, so the need for intake is reduced. Better able to manage workload, responsible approach because preventive/reduces reactive costs, benefits constituents, pet owners, and pets in many ways.

### **Caring for Animals in Confinement; Shelter Population Management:**

(goal=most efficient animal welfare system) Crucial regardless of what organization type is operating the shelter because a shelter stay is stressful for pets and therefore people. It also leads to negative sequelae such as: overcrowding that increases risk to animals and people; higher rates of infectious disease; inability to provide humane, appropriate care and housing that results in reactive, wasteful use of resources. The shortest length of stay to the best outcome should be a consistent goal.

### **Budget and Staffing:**

(goal=reflect needed programming that may involve collaborations/partnerships) Municipalities have many competing social service responsibilities and it is imperative that the animal services department operates as efficiently as possible.

### **Funding Opportunities for Pet Resource Services:**

(goal=can reduce the municipal allocation required) Building partnerships, coalitions and community support gives community members avenues to support lifesaving.

### **Renovating and/or Building:**

(goal=right-sizing a capital project) Animal spaces are uniquely specialized and exponentially more expensive to build than any other building type so it is crucial that programming is as efficient as possible.

### **Messaging/Social Media:**

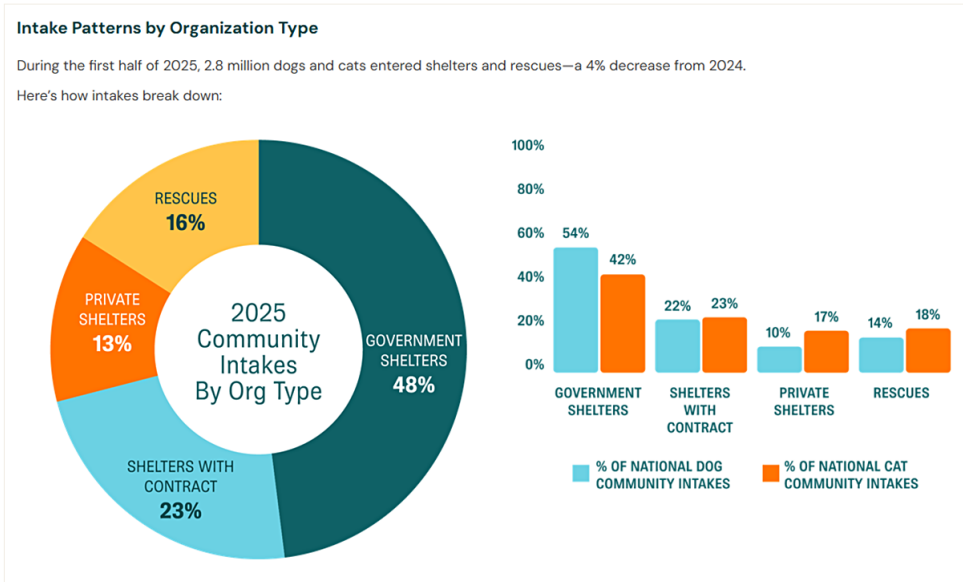
(goal=same as Funding Opps) Building partnerships, coalitions and community support while giving people avenues to support life-saving reduces the money each municipality must allocate.

## **Unified Leadership over Field Services and Shelter Operations**

Field Services and Sheltering come together in an intricately interdependent system. It is most efficient for the same leader to oversee both, as intake and population management policies directly impact the sheltering operation in positive or negative ways.

The caliber and effectiveness of the leader overseeing Field Services and/or Sheltering is more important than the type of organization they are employed by, although there are pros and cons with both municipal and non-profit infrastructures.

There are no industry standards or state mandates requiring specific oversight of the animal welfare system in a municipality. As a result, there is great variation among municipalities.



Reference: [Shelter Animals Count and Shelter Animals Count](#)

*Key: Shelters with contracts may be public municipal shelters with non-profit contracts or vice versa, often referred to as hybrid shelters. Within a municipality at any given time, Field Services and/or Sheltering may be under:*

- The county/city manager, administrator or mayor
- County commissioners or city council
- A department or sub-department under the above such as Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Code Enforcement, the Health Department, Police or the Sheriff, another municipality or non-profit, ideally through a Memorandum of Understanding/contract that is mutually beneficial.

Within any of these models, ownership of land and the facility varies along with maintenance and utility costs; all this should be addressed through the Memorandum of Understanding.

Appendix A: Sample Contract Template from Team Shelter USA

Who Should Oversee Field Animal Services and Sheltering?

Aspect	Municipal (Government)	Nonprofit (Charitable/Rescue)	Official/Expert Guidance
Funding Stability	Tax funded — intended to be predictable baseline support	Donation/grant based — funding may fluctuate	ASPCA: Adequate funding is essential for both public and private shelters to meet responsibilities <a href="#">Position Statement on Responsibilities of Animal Shelters   ASPCA</a>
Legal Authority	Has enforcement authority (animal control, licensing, cruelty investigations)	Limited authority; must contract with municipality for legal enforcement unless specialized for enforcement duties	NACA / Best Friends Manual: Government enforcement + nonprofit partnership is most effective <a href="#">People, Pets, and Policies   Best Friends AniHumane Animal Control Manual   Best Friends Animal Societymal Society NACA Guidelines</a>
Flexibility / Innovation	Bureaucratic; slower to adopt new programs	Highly adaptable; can innovate rapidly	Shelter Animals Count: Collaborative partnerships allow program expansion and innovation <a href="#">Home - Shelter Animals Count</a>
Community Outreach / Prevention Programs	Often limited; may focus on reactive enforcement unless additional support exists	Often strong focus on pet retention, veterinary support, and education	SAC: Data on community programs essential for measuring impact <a href="#">Home - Shelter Animals Count</a>

Aspect	Municipal (Government)	Nonprofit (Charitable/Rescue)	Official/Expert Guidance
Accountability	Public oversight; subject to elected officials	Board governance and donor accountability	SAC / ASPCA: Clear accountability and transparency are essential for effective services <a href="#">Position Statement on Responsibilities of Animal Shelters   ASPCA Home - Shelter Animals Count</a>
Service Scope	Mandatory coverage for field and shelter services	Can fill gaps, provide specialized programs, expand capacity	Best practice: Partnerships combine municipal coverage with nonprofit specialized services <a href="#">Humane Animal Control Manual   Best Friends Animal Society</a> <a href="#">National Animal Care &amp; Control Association. Best Practices in Animal Control Management NACA Guidelines</a>
Pros	Intended for stable baseline service; legal authority; public safety coordination, may or may not be open to fundraising	Mission-driven, flexible, community-focused, able to fundraise	Hybrid systems leveraging both models
Cons	Limited flexibility; budget constraints; may underfund community programs	Variable funding; limited authority; dependent on contracts for official enforcement	Recommend combining strengths rather than choosing one model exclusively

Reference: [jBank Consulting](#)

### References and Resources:

- [🔗 NACA Position Statement on Unity of Animal Control and Sheltering](#)
- [🔗 All Shelters Are Not Alike – The Important Differences That Can Affect the Mission](#)
- [🔗 Understanding Organization Type Data](#)

- [🔗 Why Local Governments Should Be Required to Provide Animal Control Services](#)
- [🔗 Understanding Your Local Government & Animal Control Information for Cats](#)
- [🔗 Understanding Animal Welfare Organizations: Types of Shelters, Rescues, and Services](#)
- [🔗 ASPCA Position Statement on Responsibilities of Animal Shelters](#)
- [🔗 Best Friends Humane Animal Control Manual](#)

## Responsible Public Policy: Improves Efficiencies

All state statutes address animal cruelty and dangerous dog issues. They provide for varying elements and logistics, including issues such as stray holds, licensing requirements, etc.

- [🔗 Animal Legal & Historical Center](#)
- [🔗 State and Local Animal Welfare Laws](#)
- [🔗 State Animal Anti-Cruelty Statutes Overview](#)

Unfortunately, according to [Shelter Animals Count](#), there are many more victims of animal cruelty and neglect that do not enter shelters or get help than do. This makes it crucial that Field Services teams and law enforcement focus on true perpetrators of cruelty and neglect instead of mass punitive actions that could be handled through community or proactive programming assistance. Furthermore, 70% of those people guilty of domestic violence [also abuse animals](#), which highlights the importance of the [One Health approach](#).

Most animal welfare organizations do not budget sufficiently or have a well-thought-out plan for large scale hoarding and cruelty cases. Whenever safe and possible, care in place until an alternative placement can be arranged is best while working on immediate disposition. Networking with other local shelters, area rescue groups, national organizations, and foster volunteers, as well as recruiting the community to help, are essential strategies. This will help avoid large scale intake of pets who are [not likely](#) to get appropriate care in confinement due to their large numbers. Additionally, operational costs [may be offset with restitution payments](#), but these are rarely paid.

When local or state law enforcement is involved, several non-profit national animal welfare organizations do their best to assist, but do not always have the capacity. These include:

- [🔗 ASPCA National Field Response Team](#)
- [🔗 Humane World Animal Rescue Team](#)
- [🔗 Animal Rescue Corps](#)
- [🔗 Bissell Pet Foundation](#)

For all other issues, state statutes, ordinances, and protocols have historically been created with good intentions. However, they are commonly created without data or facts, and as a result many are outdated. It is crucial that all state laws, local ordinances, and protocols be aligned with baseline industry standards, especially since there are now ample data and studies to support a modern animal welfare system.

It is important to note that any changes in a local municipal ordinance may be more strict, but not more lax, than the state statute. Ordinances should provide pathways for accountability that both prevent and resolve issues without creating new ones.

## Ordinance Revision Recommendations

Recommendations to include	Reason
Requirement for all entities utilizing shelter services to abide by the same ordinances in line with Best Practices	Ordinances in line with Best Practices are universal. Variations in ordinances within a community create unnecessary inefficiencies.
Anti-tethering	Tethering dogs as a means of housing/restraint is considered inhumane.
Sterilization if dog designated dangerous	Sterilized pets are less likely to roam to find a mate. Testosterone is linked to aggression and levels lowered when neutered. Nursing mothers are more likely to protect their pups.
Provision for community cats (exclude from leash law)	It is a societal norm for cats to have access to the outdoors or live exclusively outdoors.
Guidelines for feeding community cats and decreasing risk for wildlife	Community cats should be fed at regular times, in containers that are removed after cats eat and in areas least likely to attract or interfere with wildlife.
Define community cat	Any unowned free roaming cat that may be cared for by one or more residents of the immediate area who is/are known or unknown; a community cat may or may not be feral. Community cats that are ear tipped are sterilized and have received at least one vaccination against rabies. Community cats are exempt from any licensing, stray, abandonment, and at-large provisions directed towards owned animals. A community cat may also be defined as a cat "found" outside that is brought to an animal shelter and not yet sterilized/ear tipped.

Recommendations to include	Reason
Define community cat caregiver	A person who provides care, including food, shelter, or medical care to a community cat, while not being considered the owner, custodian, harbinger, controller, or keeper of a community cat or to have care or charge of a community cat. Caregivers must make every effort to minimize the impact on local wildlife, feed the proper quantity of food for the number of cats in appropriate food containers, discard food containers daily, and feed only on their property or with the permission of another landowner (city, state or federal public property). Community cat caregivers shall not be deemed to own, have custody, care, or control of community cats. Community cat caregivers may redeem community cats from the shelter without proof of ownership and are exempt from any charges and/or fees.
Exclude Return-to-Field program from abandonment clause	The intent of an abandonment clause is to protect pets from being left in an unfamiliar place. A Return-to-Field program involves returning community cats to their home location where they were already cared for.
Housing bite quarantine only if owner unknown (pending dangerous dog investigation is at the discretion of the director)	Shelter space should be reserved for stray pets with no other options or part of an enforcement case. Owners of pets in need of quarantine from a single incidence should be responsible for the quarantine arrangements.
3-day stray hold for dogs over 5 months to live outcome	Most stray dogs are reclaimed by their owners within the first 3 days and LOS leads to negative consequences. Nationally only 20% of stray dogs are reclaimed through a shelter.
No stray hold for kittens and puppies under 5 months to live outcome	Kittens and puppies are at high risk of contracting an infectious disease at the shelter and are not part of the reunification pool. LOS leads to negative consequences.

Recommendations to include	Reason
No stray hold for cats over 5 months to live outcome	Less than 2% of stray cats are reclaimed through a shelter. Studies show that cats are 7 to 13 times more likely to find their way home from the street or find another home when compared to a shelter (Ref Lord and Owen). Trap and euthanize is ineffective at decreasing community cat numbers. LOS leads to negative consequences.
Foster during stray hold	Overall, most of shelter population will not be reclaimed. LOS leads to negative consequences.
Cap on adoption fees	Low adoption fees correlated with lower LOS.
Provision to waive adoption fee	Fee waived adoptions correlate to LOS. Fees do not correlate to responsible pet ownership or human-animal bond.
Financial incentive for services with reclaim (spay/neuter, rabies vaccination and microchip)	Fees, fines and citations prior to reclaim for a stray at large and not part of an enforcement case is a barrier to reclaim. Offering incentive for services is beneficial for pet, owner, shelter, and Field Services and provide sustainable resolution.
Allowance for spay/neuter agreement	If pre-adoption spay/neuter not possible, LOS leads to negative consequences.

Recommendations to exclude	Reason
Memorandum of Understanding or contracts with shelters not linked to number of animals admitted	Shelter space should be reserved for public and animal safety cases and pets with no alternatives.
Field Officers do not convenience transport owner surrenders or healthy community cats for the purpose of shelter intake	Field Officers should focus on public and animal safety and proactive community programs.
Breed Specific Legislation	No evidence that physical characteristics are linked to aggression.
Pet Limits	Not correlated to responsible pet ownership or hoarding risk.

Recommendations to exclude	Reason
Regulation of community cat colonies or caregivers	Does not promote partnership efforts with caregivers and feeders, positions animal control entity as the enemy. Resources wasted with no positive outcome.
Mandatory spay/neuter for the general public	No evidence that mandatory spay/neuter linked to decreasing shelter intake, creates a punitive action with no resolution, risk of increasing shelter intake. (AVMA and ASPCApro.org)

Reference: [The Best Practice Playbook for Animal Shelters](#)

Local laws should reflect state statutes regarding cruelty, neglect, dangerous dogs, address immediate disposition, and include the response process to other species including large animals and sick/injured wildlife and emergencies.

**References and Resources:**

- [🔗 The Best Practice Playbook for Animal Shelters by Sara Pizano, DVM, MA](#)
- [🔗 National Animal Care & Control Association \(NACA\)](#)
- [🔗 Best Practices in Local Animal Control Ordinances](#)
- [🔗 Best Friends Animal Society: People Pets and Policies Guide](#)
- [🔗 Humane Animal Control Manual](#)
- [🔗 AVMA Model Dog and Cat Control Ordinance](#)
- [🔗 HumanePro Municipal Pet Policy Toolkit](#)

While the content of any state law or local ordinance is vital to an efficient, modern animal welfare system, municipal attorneys are equally important. These attorneys should be well-versed in state and local laws as well as in the basics of best practice industry standards and the importance of focused punitive action. Animal welfare laws are useless if there is no accountability and enforcement for true perpetrators of cruelty and neglect, yet this is a [common issue nationwide](#).

# Animal Hoarding: Why Classification Matters

Animal hoarding cases are among the most complex and resource-intensive situations municipalities face, although they may make up only a small percentage of the calls. They are frequently mishandled because they are approached solely as criminal matters when, in reality, many cases stem from underlying mental health, social service, public health issues, and lack of access to veterinary care. Hoarding can be linked to child welfare, elder welfare, housing instability, and community health concerns.

Adding pet limits to a local ordinance does not prevent hoarding. Hoarding is not a numbers issue alone; it is a behavioral and systems issue. Effective intervention depends on correctly identifying the type of hoarding involved, because each requires a different response strategy. A one-size-fits-all enforcement approach is rarely effective and often leads to recurrence.

There are four primary patterns of animal hoarding. Understanding these distinctions allows municipalities to align enforcement, social services, and community resources appropriately. [The Hoarding of Animals: An Update](#)

## 1. Overwhelmed Caregiver

An overwhelmed caregiver typically begins with good intentions. This individual may have taken in additional animals during a crisis, such as a family emergency, housing disruption, or informal rescue effort, and gradually becomes unable to provide adequate care.

Unlike other types of hoarding, the overwhelmed caregiver often recognizes that conditions have deteriorated and may be receptive to assistance. With structured support such as spay/neuter services, temporary fostering, veterinary care, or rehoming pathways, these cases can often be resolved without aggressive enforcement. Early intervention is key.

## 2. Compulsive or “True” Hoarder

This individual accumulates animals beyond their capacity to provide care and lacks insight into the severity of the situation. Living conditions frequently decline for both animals and people in the household. The individual may resist intervention and minimize concerns despite clear evidence of neglect.

These cases typically require a coordinated, multi-agency approach involving Animal Services, public health, mental health professionals, and in some cases, the courts.

Simply removing animals without addressing underlying behavioral health factors often results in recurrence.

### 3. Rescue-Driven Hoarder

This type of hoarding is often more complicated because the individual identifies as an animal rescuer. They may operate under the name of a rescue organization, solicit donations, and believe they are the only person capable of saving certain animals.

While the intent may initially be rooted in compassion, conditions can deteriorate as intake continues without adequate resources, space, outcome opportunities, or veterinary care. These situations require careful assessment. Collaboration with other reputable animal welfare organizations, structured placement plans, and, when appropriate, regulatory oversight may be necessary to prevent further harm.

### 4. Exploitative Hoarder

This is the least common but most clearly criminal category. In these cases, animals are intentionally accumulated for financial gain or personal benefit with little or no intent to provide proper care. Funds may be raised under false pretenses, and neglect is often severe.

Unlike other hoarding patterns that may involve mental health components, exploitative cases are primarily criminal matters. Law enforcement involvement and prosecution are typically appropriate, alongside immediate protective measures for the animals involved.

### Why This Distinction Is Critical

Misclassifying a hoarding case can lead to ineffective intervention, wasted municipal resources, and repeated crises. Effective policy recognizes that some cases require supportive services and behavioral health intervention, while others require coordinated enforcement and legal action.

Understanding the type of hoarding involved allows municipalities to:

- Allocate resources appropriately
- Reduce recurrence
- Protect public and animal health
- Minimize unnecessary large-scale shelter intake
- Coordinate more effectively across departments

(See the **Community-Minded Field Services** section for recommended response pathways.)

### References and Resources:

- [🔗 Animal Law: Cases and Materials, Bruce Wagman, Sonia Waisman, et al.](#)
- [🔗 Animal Cruelty – National Agricultural Law Center](#)
- [🔗 2025 U.S. Animal Protection Laws Rankings - Animal Legal Defense Fund](#)
- [🔗 Animal Cruelty Law Summaries by State - Association of Prosecuting Attorneys](#)
- [🔗 NACA Statement on Breed Specific Legislation](#)
- [🔗 NACA Statement on the Potential for Expansion of Courtroom Animal Advocates Program \(CAAP\) Laws](#)

## Community-Minded Field Services

Traditional/historical Field Services programs have focused on punitive actions that included a broad range of infractions that could have been more effectively dealt with through a social services approach. All programs and protocols must be in line with established goals and based on data, trends, and facts as opposed to assumptions. For example, it is incorrect to assume that because a pet is neglected there is malicious intent. It may be an access to care issue stemming from any number of root causes such as financial limitations, physical proximity to a veterinarian, transportation, life circumstance, etc. The importance of partnership and collaboration instead of the historical adversarial relationships between municipal Field Services and non-profit animal welfare organizations cannot be overstated, as more pets who are victims of non-malicious neglect can be helped through collaboration.

Most animal cruelty goes unreported, and victims do not get help or enter a shelter. As a result, accurate national numbers of formulas for local municipalities to predict rates are not available. In addition, in the recently published [Field Services 2023-2025 Report](#) by the National Animal Control Association and Shelter Animals Count, only 19% of calls resulted in shelter intake. This means that while the majority of animal control or welfare calls are resolved without a shelter intake or prosecution, there remains great potential to improve by reserving Field Services for true perpetrators of cruelty and malicious neglect.

While all Field Services resources should be used strategically, the most important of these are staff time and call types. Trends that emerged at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, for example, proved there is even greater potential to reduce the percentage of intake by keeping dogs in their own neighborhoods. These [studies](#)

show that dogs at large were close to home, yet a shelter intake intended to reunite them with their owners yielded only a 19% reunification rate in 2025, even lower than previous years.

### References and Resources:

- [New Study: Most Lost Dogs Are Found Less Than a Mile From Their Homes](#)
- [Unrestrained Dog Population Study](#)
- [A New Web-Based Tool for RTO-Focused Animal Shelter Data Analysis](#)

This ties into call type categories and the purpose of a Field Services officer responding to a visually healthy dog at large, who is not aggressive, in immediate danger, or part of a larger scale enforcement case. Consideration should be made to intervene in a way other than dispatching Field Services and using the Field Services teams in the most productive ways. An excellent webinar on this topic is [How Field Officers are addressing pet transport barriers directly in the community](#).

A recent [Field Services data report](#) summarizing stray/at-large outcomes from multiple agencies shows that:

- Approximately 19% of stray or at-large animal calls ultimately resulted in the animal entering shelter care (i.e., being found/impounded).
- 26% of animals were never located by responding officers
- A significant portion of stray calls were resolved through *services* or *education* rather than physical impoundment
- This suggests that a large majority ( $\approx 74\%$ ) of stray/at-large calls do *not* result in the dog being taken into custody, either because the animal cannot be located or it is resolved in alternate ways.

## Consideration for Field Services Infrastructure

Animal Control Officers (ACOs) play a critical role in community safety and animal welfare and should be [recognized as first responders](#). Their safety, training, and operational support must be prioritized when designing field services programs.

### Community Response and Call Triage

Many communities benefit from a response model that prioritizes problem-solving and resource connection before enforcement. One approach is the use of a Pet Resource Team, sometimes referred to as *Animal Peace Officers*, who serve as the first point of contact for animal-related concerns.

### Under this model:

- Staff or trained volunteers respond to incoming calls and attempt to match community members with appropriate resources.
- These resources may include direct assistance, referrals to partner organizations, or guidance on resolving common animal-related issues.
- If the Pet Resource Team determines that the situation requires enforcement or investigation, the call is then referred to Field Services officers.

The goal of this approach is to reduce unnecessary shelter intake, resolve underlying issues, and prevent repeat calls for service so Field Services can focus on true enforcement issues.

## Standard Operating Procedures

Field services operations should be guided by clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) developed in collaboration with key partners such as the local attorney's office, police departments, and sheriff's offices. These procedures should ensure that the handling and disposition of animals is consistent and legally sound.

Agencies must also maintain strict adherence to state statutes governing dangerous dogs, cruelty, and neglect cases.

For additional guidance, the National Animal Control Association (NACA) provides [detailed recommendations](#) for field services operations and agency staffing. See more in the [Budgeting and Staffing section](#).

## Hours of Operation

Field services coverage should reflect both community needs and efficient use of resources.

- Routine field services may operate during standard weekday daytime hours.
- Evenings, weekends, and overnight coverage should generally be reserved for true enforcement emergencies.

## Emergency and Disaster Planning

Every agency should maintain a clear response plan for large-scale seizures, natural disasters, and other emergency events involving animals.

## Effective planning includes:

- Coordinating with local and state emergency response teams
- Establishing partnerships with animal welfare organizations and shelters
- Preparing protocols for temporary housing, medical care, and transport of animals

## References and Resources:

- [NACA Disaster Response Portal](#)
- [ASPCA Disaster Relief](#)
- [Humane World for Animals Disaster Relief](#)
- [National Animal Health Emergency Management System](#)

## Response, Referrals, and Community Resources

Call type/Issue	Recommended Strategy Considerations
Visually healthy dog at large, non-aggressive, non-enforcement, not in danger	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Dispatch or Pet Resource staff, ask finder to foster for a stray hold if can do so safely (Foster Finder), and provide instructions/support to locate owner</li><li>2. Dispatch or Pet Resource staff post lost dog on website and social media</li><li>3. Respond on day 2 if dog is still free roaming</li></ol>
Injured, aggressive dog or in danger	Field Services responds
Visually healthy free roaming cat	Leave in place vs create pathway for spay/neuter and return to original home location
Hoarder/Overwhelmed Caregiver	Provide resources for spay/neuter/placement
True hoarder	Provide resources for spay/neuter/placement, if possible, keep select ones in place if adequate care can be provided. Refer to social services for mental well-being counseling.
Rescue hoarder	Create partnerships and collaborations to move animals out of harm's way, refer to social services for mental well-being counseling.
Exploiter hoarder	Criminal prosecution

## References and Resources:

Make sure Field Services have [NACA membership](#) and [State Animal Control Association membership](#) if available.

- [🔗 NACA position statement: Recognizing the Role of the Animal Control Officer](#)
- [🔗 NACA First Responders Position Statement](#)
- [🔗 Animal Hoarding and The Link](#)
- [🔗 Animal hoarding: A systematic review](#)
- [🔗 Challenges in Sheltering Seized Animals from Hoarders from a One Welfare Perspective](#)

## Proactive Strategic Community Programming

“The most effective animal services systems focus on prevention. Community programs and public messaging should be built around the problems that most frequently lead to animal control calls and shelter intake. Municipal websites, automated phone messages, and social media channels should provide clear information that helps residents solve these issues before they escalate.” - Sara Pizano, DVM, MA

For example, the [majority of the canines entering shelters are categorized as “stray,”](#) so instructions for a constituent who found a free-roaming dog should be easily found and prominently displayed on the website.

The historical and still-traditional animal control and sheltering model is reaction-based, and a system that creates additional/different issues instead of solving for the right problems. It is also by nature inequitable. A disproportionate number of animals entering shelters are from lower income areas while adoptions, especially where programs have high adoption fees, go to those of higher means. In [one study](#), 47% of the pets were from areas of high social vulnerability and only 8% from the least vulnerable.

Another [analysis](#) showed that “The highest number of intakes were in high-development, low-income neighborhoods, whereas the lowest number of intakes were in low-development, high-income neighborhoods.” ([PubMed](#) and [Best Friends Animal Society](#)). This [well-documented](#) phenomenon is termed *socioeconomic clustering of intake*. This information is not surprising considering the [tens of millions of pet owners who struggle to provide care](#).

In a Los Angeles [study](#), approximately 77% of those who surrendered their pets cited cost as the reason and many were from lower socioeconomic status. Additional invaluable data [revealed](#) that those who surrendered were unaware of available resources. Nonetheless, in some communities there are minimal to no resources, and the traditional system has always triggered shelter intake and not prevention. It is [crucial](#) that Field Services calls based on lack of access to care with no malice be treated as social services issues as opposed to enforcement issues.

Enough data and trends are available within the animal welfare industry to prove that preventive initiatives such as subsidized, targeted spay/neuter and Safety Net programs reduce field calls for service and shelter intake. This allows Field Services to be reserved for true enforcement and public and animal safety actions. Shelter confinement leads to negative sequelae that include but are not limited to immense stress for pets and people, risk of overcrowding, infectious disease spread, and the inability to house pets appropriately, safely, or even humanely. It shifts the care and outcome to the shelter team in finite spaces with finite resources, which creates enormous stress as well as Compassion Fatigue and Moral Injury for people. **Read more in the Staffing, Leadership, and Workforce Well-being section of Frequently Asked Questions.**

Costs to subsidize services can come from a variety of sources including but not limited to municipal allocations, low fees for services, collaborations/partnerships with other animal welfare organizations, grants and private donations.

**Read more in Funding Opportunities.**

### **Key Strategic Proactive Community Programs to Consider Subsidizing:**

Spay/neuter with a focus on large breed dogs and cats with access to the outdoors targets the types of pets at risk of entering shelters and enduring long lengths of stay. Programs should include rabies vaccinations, which increase the community immunity to rabies and should be considered a public health goal.

Visually healthy cats allowed access to the outdoors are an important target group and should not enter shelters unless they are part of a true enforcement case, sick, injured, or on a pathway for spay/neuter and return to their original home location.

### **References and Resources:**

- [Rethinking the Animal Shelter's Role in Free-Roaming Cat Management](#)
- [New UF Study on the Life-Saving Impact of TNR and RTF](#)
- [Community Engagement and the Effectiveness of Free-Roaming Cat Control Techniques: A Systematic Review](#)

*Microchip and vaccine clinics* increase community immunity against rabies and provide assistance for pet owners who may not otherwise be able to afford veterinary care. Microchips, registered at the time of the clinic to the owner, will increase the Return to Owner rate should the pet enter the shelter or stray from the owner's property, and clinics provide an opportunity to discuss access to spay/neuter services.

*Access to basic veterinary care* is important, because many pet owners are struggling to provide care:

- [2023 Access to Veterinary Care & Animal Welfare Organizations](#)
- [Meals on Wheels Pet Programming and Client Needs Assessment](#)
- [Open Door Veterinary Collective](#)
- [Open Door Veterinary Collective Research](#)

*Supported Self Rehoming* allows pet owners to rehome their pets directly, thus avoiding a shelter intake. It should also be noted that most pets who are rehomed in the U.S. do not go through a shelter system, so encouraging and equipping pet owners makes sense. Resources include:

- [HASS Supportive Self Rehoming Toolkit](#)
- [Adopt-a-Pet Rehome](#)
- [Home to Home](#)








Another challenging area is pet-friendly housing. One [study](#) showed that 14% of all pet relinquishments in the dataset were due to housing-related issues (landlord restrictions, eviction/housing loss, homelessness). This connects housing instability (a social service / human welfare domain) directly with animal relinquishment, highlighting again the need for collaboration and preventive services.

Many municipalities across the country fund proactive programs and benefit in many ways. A few examples include:

- New York City [authorized](#) \$500,000 for expanding access to affordable spay/neuter services to reduce shelter crowding and help low-income residents.
- Albuquerque and Austin [offer](#) subsidized vaccines, microchips, and spay/neuter services as part of their community outreach programs, making proactive care more accessible and aligned with public health goals.
- [Dallas](#) subsidizes spay/neuter and preventive services through partnerships with nonprofits, showing city-level investment in proactive animal health programs.
- [Sacramento](#) held joint vaccine clinics providing people with COVID vaccines and

pets with rabies and other vaccines.

It is important to track community program data that includes the number of people and pets across all programs. This must be done in order to budget workload appropriately and identify potential funding sources, especially as it relates to reducing Field Services calls and shelter intake. These programs help constituents, pet owners, and pets more than a shelter intake, addresses root causes, and is more compassionate and fiscally responsible.

 <p>Fiscally responsible approach</p>	 <p>Reduces the number of Field Services calls</p>	 <p>Utilizes staff more efficiently</p>	 <p>Increases community immunity against rabies</p>
 <p>Reduces shelter intake and the space needed to house pets in confinement with the associated risks. This is particularly important when considering renovations or new builds, since costs for housing spaces for pets are exponentially higher than a typical office building or hospital.</p>	 <p>Allows for more efficient management of all resources and therefore minimizes waste of reactive resources</p>	 <p>More humane approach for pets and more compassionate approach for people</p>	

## References and Resources:

- [Impact of Publicly Sponsored Neutering Programs on Animal Population Dynamics at Animal Shelters](#)
- [Community-Facing Shelter Medicine](#)
- [HumanePro Municipal Pet Policy Toolkit](#)
- [A Systematic Review of the Literature Addressing Veterinary Care for Underserved Communities](#)

## Key Strategies: Caring for Animals in Confinement

While the municipality may not operate the animal shelter, it is crucial that leadership over the non profit and/or municipal program has an understanding of the basic best practice industry standards. Best practice industry standards and all recommendations for humane sheltering remain the same regardless of whether the shelter is operated by a non-profit entity or municipality. State laws, local ordinances, Field Services, intake, and operational policies and procedures dictate the success or failure of the

animal welfare system and have a positive or negative fiscal impact.

Whenever possible, alternatives to shelter intake should be prioritized. Shelter stays inevitably increase stress and anxiety for animals (and therefore people), contribute to overcrowding, raise the risk of infectious disease and euthanasia, compromise humane housing conditions, and place unnecessary strain on limited resources.

#### References and Resources:

- [Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#)
- [Best Practice Playbook for Animal Shelters](#)
- [HASS Playbook](#)

## Managed Coordinated Intake

The traditional animal welfare narrative includes a formula that is irreconcilable. It is not possible to admit every pet presented to a shelter, care for and house them appropriately, and find a permanent placement for them in a short period of time.

Managed Coordinated Intake means that all options to intake are exhausted with better alternatives. This allows leadership to better manage the workload, reduces the need for shelter intake, minimizes the waste of finite resources, is the fiscally responsible approach, and benefits constituents, pet owners, and pets.

#### References and Resources:

- [NACA Guideline on Appointment-Based Pet Intake into Shelters](#)
- [NACA Appointment Based Intake FAQ](#)
- [Intake of Healthy Wildlife](#)
- [Community/Free Roaming Cats](#)
- [ASPCA Managed Admission](#)

## Population Management/Shortest Length of Stay

A shelter stay under any circumstances evokes stress and anxiety for pets. The shortest time in confinement, referred to as the length of stay, is **beneficial** to both people who are caring for them and the pets.

The shortest length of stay is accomplished by first exhausting alternatives to intake and if pets are admitted to the shelter, ensuring that there is a dynamic action plan for their outcome through key programs. Daily or frequent rounds are required so staff are adjusting the action plan as needed.

Humane housing is required for all pets in confinement, as it helps keep them healthy both physically and mentally. A minimum of double compartment housing at 11 square feet per cat is needed, as smaller spaces correlate to stress that leads to upper respiratory infections. Larger spaces are more beneficial, with the main goal for food/water/bed and litter box to be as far apart as possible. In addition, cats should be provided with interactive toys, options to hide, and a soft bed. Felines should be housed alone or with cats/kittens they are bonded with, and have completely separate spaces and pathways from canines both visually and audibly.

For dogs, a minimum of a double compartment run with half of the run with access to fresh air will help minimize the infectious respiratory disease rate. All dogs and puppies need the option of a soft bed and interactive toys.

Consistent sanitation practices, and providing vaccines and preventive care at the point of intake will help minimize infectious disease rates as will appropriate species-specific enrichment to ensure the mental well-being of each pet.

#### References and Resources:

- [ASPCA disinfectant chart](#)
- [ASV Guidelines](#)
- [Drs. Wagner and Hurley Publish Pair of Studies of the Effects of Housing on Shelter Cat Health, Well-Being, and Adoption](#)
- [Infectious Disease Management in Animal Shelters](#)
- [Capacity for Care Resources](#)
- [ASPCA Population Rounds](#)

#### Key Programs:

### Return to Owner Program for Dogs

Only a small fraction of canines entering shelters in the stray category are reunited with their families. Therefore, since the goal of reunification through a shelter intake is not met most of the time, consideration should be made to keep dogs in their neighborhoods. If visually healthy dogs at large do enter the shelter, the focus should be on reunification.

#### References and Resources:

- [ASPCA Shelter Stats](#)
  - [HASS Toolkit](#)
  - [HASS RTH Benchmarking Tool](#)
- Coming Soon: Home First!

## Free Roaming Cat Management/Shelter Neuter Return

Visually healthy, free-roaming cats should enter a shelter only if they are on a pathway for spay/neuter/rabies vaccination and return to their original location where they are already cared for. Less than 2% of felines entering shelters in the stray category are reunited with their families, which highlights the need for a different approach. [Key Strategic Proactive Community Programs to Consider Subsidizing: Spay/neuter](#)

### References and Resources:

- [Managing Community Cats](#)
- [Re-Thinking the Animal Shelter's Role in Free Roaming Cat Management](#)
- [National Animal Control Association Position Statement on free roaming community cats](#)

## Foster Finder/ Foster Care/Foster to Adopt

Many community members are willing to foster, but shelters tend to limit outreach. Foster Finder programs keep dogs who are off their property in their own neighborhoods, where they are more likely to find their way home than in a shelter. Foster care and Foster to Adopt programs reduce the number of pets housed in confinement and increase the chance of a permanent adoption.

### References and Resources:

- [8 Reasons Why You Should Foster a Pet](#)
- [New Data Report: Foster-Based Rescues Operations](#)
- [Foster Care Resources](#)
- [Briefly fostering a shelter dog ups its chances of adoption](#)
- [Evaluating the effects of a temporary fostering program on shelter dog welfare](#)

## Dog Day Out/Sleep Overs for Dogs

Giving dogs a break from the shelter reduces stress hormones and helps them cope in confinement.

### References and Resources:

- [The Influence of Brief Outing and Temporary Fostering Programs on Shelter Dog Welfare](#)
- [Sleepovers reduce stress in shelter dogs](#)

[VCA Charities Dog Day Out](#)

[Doggy Day Outs, Field Trips & Short-Term Fosters: Reducing Stress in Shelter Dogs While Increasing Volunteers and Adoptions](#)

## Streamlined Spay/Neuter and Medical Care for Shelter Pets

The percentage of pets arriving in the shelters unaltered has been on the rise, and lack of access to veterinary care is a leading driver of relinquishment. Housing is often conditional on the neutered status of pets. Targeted, subsidized spay/neuter programs address financial barriers, keep pets with their loving families and prevent a shelter intake.

If a pet is accepted into confinement and custody, the sheltering organization is obligated to provide preventive care including core vaccines at the point of intake and for the basic care and spay/neuter surgery.

### References and Resources:

[Why Spay/Neuter is Important](#)

[Association of Shelter Veterinarians: Veterinary Medical Care Guidelines for Spay-Neuter Programs](#)

## Play Groups for Dogs

Dogs in confinement need exercise and free play. Playgroups are correlated with reduced reactivity, barking, stress, and length of stay in the shelter.

### References and Resources:

[ASPCA Playgroups for Dogs](#)

[Dogs Playing for Life](#)

## Welcoming Adoptions

Minimizing barriers to adoption and focusing on making the right match benefits pets and people.

### References and Resources:

[Adopters Welcome](#)

[Hill's Pet Nutrition Releases 2024 State Of Shelter Pet Adoption Report](#)

## Rescue and Transport Partnerships

Collaboration between animal welfare groups helps more animals in need.

### References and Resources:

-  [BISSELL Pet Foundation Transport](#)
-  [How Animal Relocation Programs Save Lives](#)
-  [WayStation Program: Animal Rescue Transport](#)
-  [Austin Pets Alive! Transport](#)
-  [Welfare Impacts of Long-Distance Transfer of Shelter Animals](#)
-  [ASPCA Policy and Position Statement: Animal Relocation for Adoption](#)
-  [Good Flights with Greater Good Charities](#)

## Euthanasia Decisions

Staff and volunteers working in the animal welfare field care deeply about animals and are committed to lifesaving. However, there are times, as with medical cases beyond resources or hope, that euthanasia is the best decision.

For large dogs with aggression issues towards other dogs and/or people, there are a wide spectrum of opinions and beliefs with respect to the best plan. Please note that while these decisions are very difficult, it is typically less than a few percent of the dogs entering the shelter system. Yet this issue is dividing staff and volunteers internally and often triggering criticism from the community.

Large dogs with a history of injurious aggression/behavior may not be suitable candidates for adoption as they endanger public safety including shelter staff, volunteers, and visitors, and may result in civil or criminal liability even when transferred to another animal welfare agency/rescue group. This is a risk and can be damaging to the reputation of the organization. Dogs with a history of biting multiple people, severe attacks on people, or unprovoked killing of domestic pets should be considered a public safety risk and unsuitable for rehoming or placement in the community.

A standardized process should be in place with decision trees created by staff and input from volunteers. Once agreed upon, communication about decisions should be honest and transparent and universally respected.

Animal Behavior for Shelter Veterinarians and Staff by Weiss, Mohan-Gibbons, and Zawistowski

#### References and Resources:

- [ASPCA Behavior Pathway Guidelines](#)
- [Dunbar Bite Scale](#)
- [Outcomes for Pets](#)

# Data Management

Capturing appropriate data, data management and the analysis of Key Performance Indicators and trends for Community Programming, Field Services, and Sheltering is the foundation for the creation and ongoing development of an efficient animal welfare system. This is best done with software created specifically for the animal welfare industry.

“The best software for an animal organization depends on its operational needs and resources. Key factors include robust reporting for shelter intake/outcomes, support for field staff and animal control operations, and the ability to track community programs. Cost, ease of use, and integration with national data platforms and search engines are also important considerations.” - *JBank Consulting*

Minimal/Basic Key Performance Indicators that should be captured with reports easily accessible for leaders and decision makers include:



### Community Programming

- ✓ Split by species
- ✓ Categorized by programs
- ✓ Track number of people and number of pets assisted



### Field Services

- ✓ Categories of calls
- ✓ Divided by species/age
- ✓ Per officer response
- ✓ Enforcement intake
- ✓ Other intake
- ✓ By jurisdiction if applicable



### Shelter Operations

- ✓ Divided by species/age
- ✓ Intake categories
- ✓ Length of stay
- ✓ Outcome categories

## Animal Shelter Software

There are many excellent, affordable animal welfare software systems available. Organizations should utilize an existing system with features that auto upload information to other platforms. Automating tasks saves staff time, minimizes errors and amplifies advocacy for lost pets or those looking for a home.

### Options:

- [24pet.com](https://24pet.com)
- [animalsfirst.com](https://animalsfirst.com)
- [shelterbuddy.com](https://shelterbuddy.com)
- [sheltermanager.com](https://sheltermanager.com)
- [shelterluv.com](https://shelterluv.com)

### References and Resources:

- [SAC Basic Data Matrix](#)
- [Every Nose Counts \(textbook\)](#)
- [Data Standardization Resources](#)
- [ASPCA Position Statement on Data Collection & Reporting](#)
- [SAC Field Services Report](#)

## Budget and Staffing

Effective animal services systems align budgets and staffing with prevention strategies that reduce shelter intake without overburdening other groups, improve public safety, and utilize all resources efficiently.

There is significant variation in programming from community to community. As a result, there has historically been no standard benchmark budget formula for animal services. A framework introduced more recently is the [HASS Budget Calculator](#).

Great care should be taken when studying other communities. Just because another animal welfare program is funded in a certain way does not mean it represents the best or recommended budget model.

Annual budgets should be developed to support staffing and allocations for proactive community programming and funding partnerships (Pet Resource staff), Field Services, and Sheltering (when appropriate), with the following key principles in mind:

- Accurate data management is essential for responsible resource allocation.
- Animal Services is not a profit-generating department and should be viewed similarly to a Parks Department: a public service provided for constituents. That said, some potential revenue sources that may help offset costs include:

- Contract fees
  - Licensing
  - Restitution
  - Citations for true enforcement issues
  - Fees for services (vaccinations, microchips, spay/neuter)
  - Surrender fees
  - Donations collected at the time of service in shelter settings
- High fees, whether in the form of citations or adoption fees, will not support a Field Services or sheltering program in full and are often correlated with longer lengths of stay. Longer lengths of stay are associated with higher operational costs.
  - Field Services hours of operation should be practical. Regular calls should typically be answered during weekday daytime business hours, while evenings, overnight hours, and weekends should be reserved for emergency enforcement calls.
  - Shelter hours should exceed Field Services intake hours and be convenient for the public, including evening and weekend availability, as outlined in the [SAC Adoption Pulse Check Survey Report](#).
  - Most licensing programs are costly to administer and do not generate significant net revenue, although some are required by state statute.

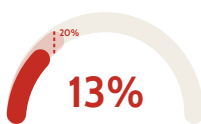
## Pet Licensing Compliance

Key findings on licensing from the [DocuPet report](#) include:

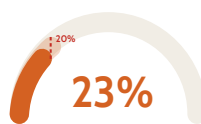
### Pet Licensing: The Reality

Pet licensing is often assumed to generate revenue for animal services. In practice, most programs have very low compliance and produce limited funding.

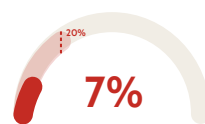
#### AVERAGE COMPLIANCE RATES



Overall Compliance  
87% of pets are unlicensed



Dog Licensing  
Roughly 1 in 4 dogs



Cat Licensing  
Very low participation

- Programs below 20% are considered "unhealthy"

The bottom line: Many municipalities report licensing systems that are inefficient, stagnant, and expensive to administer. Licensing should not be relied upon as a primary funding source for animal service.

Reference: [DocuPet Report](#)

## Staffing Considerations

Staffing needs will vary depending on the size of the organization and the level of collaborative partnerships in place. Well-managed volunteer programs are also critical, as they reduce staff workload, enhance care for animals, and improve community engagement.

### The following functional areas should be covered:

- Community messaging / social media
- Pet Resource Services
- Field Services
- Sheltering operations
  
- Administrative support
- Kennel staff
- Medical and veterinary care
  - Veterinary technicians
  - Veterinary services (in-house or outsourced; see [Shelters United VOR Toolkit](#))
  
- Enrichment team
- Program coordinators
  - Reunification
  - Foster programs
  - Rescue and transport partnerships
  - Adoption programs

Additional operational costs should also be considered, including temperature-controlled vehicles for Field Services to safely transport animals, equipment, uniforms, and other operational needs.

These provisions help standardize humane care requirements within animal control codes.

### References and Resources:

-  [NACA Resource](#)
-  [HumanePro Municipal Pet Policy Toolkit](#)

## Volunteers

The benefit of effective, well-run volunteer programs cannot be overemphasized. These programs can reduce the number of staff needed, enhance animal care, and provide exponential outreach in the community. However, it is crucial that staff are performing, held accountable, and work in productive ways with volunteers. Clear, transparent communication is essential for volunteer programs to be an asset and not a liability, and success depends on solid leadership.

### References and Resources (Volunteers):

- [2016 Volunteer Handbook](#)
- [Volunteers: ASPCApro](#)
- [Volunteers: Fund](#)
- [HASS Volunteer Integration Toolkit](#)

### References and Resources (Staffing and Budget):

- [Humane World formula for kennel staff in a shelter, supported by NACA](#)
- [NACA for field services only formula](#)
- [Compensation & Benefits Study - The Association for Animal Welfare Advancement](#)
- [Standard Operating Procedures for Data Entry and Management](#)
- [Tips for job descriptions and postings](#)
- [SOP Examples for Disease Prevention and Response in Animal Shelters](#)

## Funding Opportunities and the Importance of Philanthropic opportunities

Many people want to support lifesaving animal welfare programs. Most municipal shelters and all nonprofit shelters accept financial donations. Municipalities are legally permitted to fundraise and offer tax-deductible giving, just as they do for other public services such as parks, libraries, and sports facilities through bequests, naming rights, and other contributions. A formal gift policy and process should be established to guide these efforts.

Although highly competitive, municipal shelters are also eligible for many grant opportunities offered by national animal welfare organizations, including [Maddie's Fund](#), [ASPCA Pro](#), [Petco Love](#), and [PetSmart Charities](#), among others.

Municipalities may also develop partnerships with nonprofit organizations to support fundraising efforts. In some communities, a dedicated nonprofit entity, such as a "Friends of the Animal Shelter" group, is created to accept and manage donations on behalf of the municipal program.

The giving process should be simple and accessible. Options should include online donations, QR codes displayed at the shelter, and automated donation opportunities integrated into shelter software. For example, platforms such as [Shelterluv](#) allow adopters to make a donation during the adoption process before completing checkout.

Transparency is essential for maintaining donor trust. Municipalities should ensure donors understand that their contributions support the animal welfare program directly and are not absorbed into the municipality's general fund or used to replace existing budget allocations.

As with any well-managed donor program, donations should be tracked and acknowledged. Acknowledgement can be simple, such as an automated email thanking the donor, but consistent stewardship helps build long-term community support.

#### References and Resources:

- [🔗 How Animal Welfare Organizations Can Finish 2025 Strong](#)
- [🔗 Animal Shelter Fundraisers: Guide, Ideas, and Best Practices](#)
- [🔗 Guide to Fundraising | Animal Shelter Guide Books](#)
- [🔗 Digital Fundraising Playbook](#)
- [🔗 Fund-Raising for Animal Care Organizations](#)

## Renovating or Building a Pet Resource Center/Animal Shelter

When considering renovating shelter spaces or designing/building a new facility, the implementation of best practice industry standards focused heavily on proactive programming is crucial. Reducing the need for shelter spaces through effective, proactive programming makes an exponential positive fiscal impact on the project. That is because building a facility to keep animals in confinement has unique features more costly than a regular build, including, but not limited to:

- Specialized/oversized plumbing
- Specialized HVAC/air exchange needs to minimize odors and infectious disease transmission
- Specialized electrical/water proofing
- Surfaces that must withstand harsh chemicals daily and be extremely durable
- Fenced-in outdoor [play yards](#) for dogs with appropriate entrances

If these items are overlooked or value-engineered out of the project, surfaces will break down and cause breaches in odor and disease control over time. If the shelter is not designed appropriately, there will be a variety of ongoing costs, repairs, etc. that will be needed and likely more expensive to mitigate in the future. The facility holding pets in confinement should be built with the physical and mental health of staff/ volunteers and pets in mind.

Because of these unique and costly features, it is very important to streamline services and use the space as efficiently as possible. This makes an enormous difference with respect to building costs, and ensuring the facility is right-sized. **Intake projections do not correlate directly with increased human population growth in an area.** The future should include more social services as opposed to more shelter spaces.

In addition, specialized spaces for animals in confinement require the expertise of architects with experience in designing animal shelters. These highly specialized architectural firms work nationwide and often subcontract under a local architect.

**Some examples can be found here:**

- [!\[\]\(11dfef7c64d18724c0f534f44b65d14a\_img.jpg\) Animal Arts](#)
- [!\[\]\(bddddd795c45053a4fc7633e3bd3ed2c\_img.jpg\) Designed Learned](#)
- [!\[\]\(3464c9164696fb9e028696ac287946ec\_img.jpg\) Shelter Planners of America](#)
- [!\[\]\(ac196a42dcc785a428c381ee4ef6ea06\_img.jpg\) Bacon Group Architecture](#)

**References and Resources:**

- [!\[\]\(189b71c3376efbaab57d7dfddf9edce5\_img.jpg\) Best Practice Playbook for Animal Shelters, page 23](#)
- [!\[\]\(18d72c3553029c4c3be2030302ec8146\_img.jpg\) How to Design Animal Shelters with Fear Free Principles in Mind](#)
- [!\[\]\(93ee3d372fad78bc2ca7b267cae69bbc\_img.jpg\) Drs. Wagner and Hurley Publish Pair of Studies of the Effects of Housing on Shelter Cat](#)

## Messaging/Social Media

Effective community messaging is a critical component of a modern animal services system. Communication should be designed to help residents resolve common issues before they result in enforcement calls or shelter intake.

This begins with the most basic public-facing tools, including the website and even automated phone greetings or voicemail messages. These are often the first points of contact for residents seeking help. Leadership should identify the most common challenges facing the community – such as at-large dogs, free roaming cats, access to veterinary care, or pet retention – and ensure that clear solutions and resources are the first information residents see when they visit the website or hear when they call the department.

When residents can quickly find guidance and resources, many problems can be resolved without requiring a Field Services response or shelter intake. Information about community programs should be easy to locate and clearly explain available services. Whenever possible, these pages should also provide simple opportunities for community members to support the program financially through donations.

When animals do enter the shelter, clear and proactive communication can also improve outcomes. Several strategies can help ensure that animals receive visibility and support while in care:

- Except in enforcement cases, pets should be promoted immediately from the point of intake with a flattering photographs and basic information to help reunite them with their families or find placement quickly.
- Shelter software should be used to maximize automation, allowing pets to be posted to websites, adoption platforms, and social media channels in real time.
- Social media content should maintain a balance between animals in need of placement and positive stories that highlight successful outcomes and the important work happening behind the scenes.
- Sheltering organizations, including those operated by municipalities, should maintain their own website and direct control over social media channels, with content guided by clear Standard Operating Procedures.

Effective messaging strengthens transparency, builds community trust, and supports lifesaving outcomes by helping residents become part of the solution.

#### References and Resources:

- [🔗 5 Social Media Tips to Promote Animals for Shelters or Rescues](#)
- [🔗 Viral for a Cause: Short Form Video for Animal Shelters](#)

# Quick-Start Guide to AI for Animal Welfare Professionals

## Provided by Outcomes for Pets

Artificial intelligence is rapidly becoming a practical tool for animal welfare organizations. The following guide from Kristen Hassen provides a simple starting point for professionals interested in exploring how AI can support shelter operations.

The best way to learn AI is to, in the words of professor and AI expert Ethan Mollick, “invite it to the table.” The more you use AI for both personal and professional tasks, the faster you will understand its power and potential.

Whether we like it or not, AI is changing how we work and live. Developing a basic level of familiarity with these tools will be increasingly important for animal welfare professionals.

Animal shelters are already using AI to:

- Augment customer service to ensure consistent and accurate responses
- Develop marketing and communications campaigns
- Write and update policies, procedures, and other organizational documents
- Analyze and better use shelter data
- Streamline animal movement through the system to reduce length of stay
- Help reunite lost pets with their families more quickly
- Edit images without altering the appearance of the animal
- Manage risk and improve operational safety

If you're just getting started or training others, these tips can make learning AI easier and more productive.

Appendix B: [Quick-Start Guide to AI for Animal Welfare Professionals](#)

# Frequently Asked Questions

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK & MUNICIPAL RESPONSIBILITY

### 1. What is a municipality obligated to do?

[State statutes](#) require that each municipality be responsible for providing for public and animal safety. This may be done directly or through a contract service provider such as a nonprofit animal welfare organization or another municipality for Field Services and/or sheltering.

In today's society, humane care and lifesaving are expected of all animal services organizations. Euthanasia should be reserved only for large, community-unsafe dogs and medical cases (any species) beyond hope or resources. This lifesaving mission can and should be woven into the delivery of public and animal safety.

### 2. What are we doing currently?

Each municipality is given authority via state statute to provide for public and animal safety, but there is no national legal benchmark for programming. As a result, there is great variation between municipalities. This guide outlines the key strategies for creating the most efficient modern animal welfare system.

### 3. Is there a model animal welfare ordinance?

No. However, there are key recommendations to ensure ordinances align with best practice industry standards. (Read more in the [Responsible Public Policy section](#).)

### 4. Should the local ordinance be posted on the municipal website?

Yes. While most state laws do not mandate posting local ordinances online, municipalities are obligated to make clear the ordinances pet owners are expected to follow. (Read more in the [Responsible Public Policy section](#).)

### 5. Who provides oversight for animal control and sheltering programs?

There is no national governing body overseeing animal control and sheltering programs. [State statutes](#) address cruelty and neglect, and enforcement may fall to state or local attorneys. In some states, Departments of Agriculture or Health inspect shelters.

National organizations such as Humane World for Animals (formerly Humane Society of the United States) and the ASPCA do not govern or oversee independent shelters, even if those shelters share similar names.

## GOVERNANCE & ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

### **6. What department should oversee Field Services and/or sheltering?**

Animal Services often has one of the smallest municipal budgets but generates some of the most visible public controversy. For efficiency and responsiveness, leadership over Field Services and sheltering should report directly to municipal operations management. Read more in the [Unified Leadership section](#).

### **7. Should Animal Services fall under law enforcement?**

Modern animal welfare systems prioritize prevention and community-based solutions while reserving enforcement for true cruelty and neglect cases. Because most calls do not involve malicious intent, Animal Services should not routinely fall under police, sheriff, or code enforcement structures. Read more in the [Unified Leadership section](#).

### **8. What other departments or entities should collaborate with Animal Services?**

Strong partnerships with the Municipal Attorney's Office, Public Health, Social Services, Child Welfare, and Law Enforcement are crucial. Many animal-related cases intersect with domestic violence, hoarding, mental health, housing instability, and access to care. A [One Health/One Welfare](#) approach improves outcomes for both people and animals.

### **9. Can a municipality outsource Field Services and sheltering?**

Yes, if approved by the municipality, Field Services and/or sheltering can be outsourced to a non-profit animal welfare organization or other municipality. A detailed contract with respect to how that organization provides Field Services and/or operates the shelter is of the utmost importance and should be in line with basic best practice industry standards and operating within state and local legal requirements ([Sample Contract Template Here](#)).

### **10. Are there state or national nonprofits that will operate municipal Field Services or shelters?**

No. There are no national or state-level organizations that operate local Field Services or shelters on behalf of municipalities at scale.

### 11. Are there industry standards for Field Services?

Yes, industry standards are established by the [National Animal Control Association](#) and the [Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#). Read more in the [Field Services](#) section.

### 12. Are there industry standards for animal sheltering?

Yes. The ASV [Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#), the [Best Practice Playbook for Animal Shelters](#), and the Human Animal Support Services ([HASS Playbook](#)) provide widely recognized frameworks.

### 13. Are there model Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for community programs? Field Services? Sheltering?

There is no single national SOP package due to variation in community size and partnerships. However, the Association of Shelter Veterinarians provides [comprehensive guidelines](#) for shelter and Field Services, as do [Human Animal Support Services](#), the [National Animal Control Association](#), and [Best Friends Animal Society](#). Read more in [Budget and Staffing](#).

### 14. What is meant by “best practice industry standards,” and how does that relate to “No Kill”?

Best practice standards are based on established professional guidelines from [NACA](#) and [ASV](#). The term “No Kill” typically refers to a 90% live release rate, but varies in interpretation and does not account for length of stay or welfare considerations.

Best practice focuses on humane care, public safety, and responsible lifesaving rather than labels.

In the 1970s and 1980s an [estimated](#) 13.5 million dogs and cats were euthanized in shelters. Because of those high numbers, it became the public narrative and assumption that fewer than 10% of those pets were unhealthy or had treatable conditions and therefore 90% should not be euthanized.

When a shelter saves more than 90% of all incoming pets, it is commonly referred to as a ‘No Kill’ organization, i.e., 90% live release rate or save rate. The term No Kill, however, has varied meaning between individuals and organizations, with some meaning only pets with no hope of recovery, quality of life, or severe aggression are euthanized, while others do not believe pets should be euthanized for any reason.

The definitions of sick, quality of life, and aggression are not unified and cause great discourse throughout the entire industry. In addition, the goal of 'No Kill' or saving 90% does not take into account the mental and physical trauma of long lengths of stay in institutionalized confinement, which is problematic.

## 15. What does “Fear Free” mean?

Fear Free refers to handling and housing practices that reduce stress, fear, and anxiety in animals, improving welfare outcomes and staff safety. The Fear Free Shelters training program is free for all animal welfare staff and volunteers, and can be found at [www.fearfreesshelters.com](http://www.fearfreesshelters.com).

## DATA, TRENDS & NATIONAL CONTEXT

### 16. What data should be tracked and how?

Animal services software should capture community programming, Field Services call categories, intake types, length of stay, and outcomes. Data analysis drives strategic decision-making and resource allocation. Read more in the [Data Management](#) section.

### 17. Has shelter intake increased in recent years, including during and after the pandemic? Does intake increase as population of people in the community increases?

No. Intake has declined compared to 2019 levels. However, length of stay for large dogs has increased, contributing to overcrowding. Intake does not correlate directly with human population growth. Proactive Safety Net and community programs reduce intake more effectively than reactive shelter expansion.

### 18. Is it true that all shelter pets have behavioral or medical problems?

No. Many animals are friendly and healthy and enter shelters due to human-related challenges such as housing instability or financial hardship.

## COMMUNITY PREVENTION & ACCESS TO CARE

### 19. Why should municipalities subsidize proactive community programs?

Proactive community programs such as subsidized targeted spay/neuter that includes free roaming cats, vaccine/microchip clinics, and Safety Net programs are linked to a reduction in enforcement complaints and shelter intake, as well as increased community immunity against rabies.

These programs prevent the subsequent negative sequelae if not addressed, such as the inability to staff Field Services programs appropriately, provide for public and animal safety, and service delays. Shelter overcrowding leads to higher safety risks for staff, the public, and volunteers; higher rates of infectious disease and therefore cost of care; increased euthanasia rates; and the inability to house and care for pets humanely. Read more in the [Community Programming](#) section.

## 20. Is access to veterinary care currently a national issue?

Yes. Rising costs and workforce shortages have created significant barriers to veterinary care, contributing to shelter intake and owner surrenders. The [American Veterinary Medical Association](#) (AVMA) has recognized lack of access to care as a current crisis in the U.S.

### BUDGET & FINANCIAL STRATEGY

## 21. How can a well-run animal welfare program benefit the municipality?

Studies show significant financial and community impact benefits from efficient animal services systems, including reduced enforcement burden and improved public trust. Two excellent studies showing the enormous positive financial impact are the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma [Economic Impact Study](#) and the City of Austin, Texas [Economic Impact Study](#).

Other examples can be found here:

- [Examining the Relationship Between Social Vulnerability and Animal Shelter Intakes and Outcomes: Patterns and Implications](#)
- [Monetizing Animal Welfare Impacts for Benefit–Cost Analysis | Journal of Benefit–Cost Analysis](#)

## 22. What is the standard budget template for Animal Services?

While there is no industry standard budget template, the [Human Animal Support Services budget calculator](#) should be used to create a framework that includes community programming, Field Services, and sheltering/lifesaving.

Historically, animal control budgets have been based on the numbers of pets entering the shelter, and some were developed using a per capita dollar amount. This is no longer feasible/practical as shelter intake continues to decrease nationally, as proactive community programs become more impactful and shelter intake is not correlated with an increase in the population of people. In addition, historical Field

Services and sheltering budgets did not include those crucial proactive community programs. Read more in the [Budget and Staffing section](#).

### **23. Can Animal Services generate enough revenue to operate independently?**

No. Animal Services is not a profit-driven department. It should be viewed similarly to Parks & Recreation: a public service. High fees can increase length of stay and operational costs rather than offset them.

## **STAFFING, LEADERSHIP & WORKFORCE WELL-BEING**

### **24. How should staffing structures be developed or updated?**

Each Field Services/shelter organization must ensure best practice industry standards are in place and proactive programs are provided directly or in partnership/collaboration with other animal welfare organizations. This minimizes the waste of resources and creates the most efficient infrastructure.

Calls for Field Services should be analyzed by category to identify opportunities that could prevent calls or resolve issues quickly. And regardless of what entity oversees the shelter, processes and protocols should be in place with the sole focus of the shortest length of stay with the best care during the stay. Read more in the [Budget and Staffing section](#).

### **25. Does a shelter director need animal welfare experience?**

No. The shelter director should be an effective leader who understands the importance of managing staff professionally through appropriate training, accountability, and support. Understanding and implementing best practice industry standards can be taught/learned/studied, with all information available online.

### **26. How does exposure to cruelty and confinement affect staff and volunteers?**

People working in the animal welfare space include animal control officers, shelter staff working in public or private organizations, dispatch, other law enforcement, rescue groups, and volunteers. This broad spectrum of people is consistently exposed to animals who are neglected intentionally or unintentionally, victims of cruelty, injured, and suffering, along with people who may be responsible for their suffering.

It is well-established that this group of people commonly suffer from Compassion Fatigue and Moral Injury that leads to trauma-induced decision making. It is crucial that systems are in place to prevent animals and people from suffering, and avenues to relieve suffering by following best practice industry standards.

### Compassion Fatigue and Moral Injury References:

[Mental Well-Being of Shelter Staff](#)

[Trauma in Animal Protection and Welfare Work: The Potential of Trauma-Informed Practice](#)

[A systematic review of the effects of euthanasia and occupational stress in personnel working with animals in animal shelters, veterinary clinics, and biomedical research facilities](#)

[Compassion Fatigue In Animal Shelter Volunteers](#)

[Compassion Fatigue in People Who Care for Animals](#)

### Resources:

- [Jessica Dolce, Compassion Fatigue Educator](#)
- [Social Workers in Animal Shelters: A Strategy Toward Reducing Occupational Stress Among Animal Shelter Workers](#)
- [Caring for the Animal Caregiver—Occupational Health, Human-Animal Bond and Compassion Fatigue](#)
- [Evaluating perceived stressors and areas of needed support in animal shelter and rescue workers and volunteers](#)
- [Not One More Vet](#)

## PUBLIC TRUST & COMMUNICATION

### 27. Our organization is facing criticism on social media or in the press. How should we respond?

While there will always be criticism on social media, many misunderstandings can be prevented and/or addressed through proactive positive messaging, transparency, and focusing on collaboration and partnerships. But the most important thing is ensuring best practice industry standards are in place, with the clear intention of helping people and pets with a dedication to lifesaving. This means reserving euthanasia for large, community-unsafe dogs and medical cases (dogs or cats) beyond hope or resources.

Read more in the [Messaging and Social Media](#) section.

**Reference and Resource:**

- [🔗 People and Animals in Community Together \(PACT\)](#)

## Parting Words of Encouragement

The way we protect, care for, and save shelter dogs and cats continues to improve, and we are now at a historical low with shelter intake (save the pandemic years) and an all-time high of lifesaving at 87%, according to the [2025 Shelter Animals Count Annual Data Report](#). With more knowledge that replaces bias with factual data, there is still potential to keep pets with their people. By continuing to build, and develop creative partnerships and collaborations across sectors, there is still opportunity to help more pets and people without confinement in a shelter. This Go To Guide for Animal Services is dedicated to and in honor of all the people who work tirelessly every day to make that a reality.

## Summary of Key References and Training Opportunities

- [🔗 Maddie's University](#)
- [🔗 Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#)
- [🔗 Best Practice Playbook for Animal Shelters](#)
- [🔗 ASPCApro.org](#)
- [🔗 National Animal Control Association](#)
- [🔗 Humane World for Animals \(national conference\)](#)
- [🔗 Best Friends Animal Society \(national conference\)](#)
- [🔗 International City/County Management Association](#)
- [🔗 National Association of Counties](#)
- [🔗 Human Animal Support Services Playbook](#)
- [🔗 JBankConsulting.com](#)
- [🔗 Outcomes for Pets](#)



# Maddie's Fund

The Duffield Foundation

This guide was made possible by a grant from [Maddie's Fund®](#), #ThanksToMaddie.

## Appendix

# Appendix A



**Purpose:** The following TEMPLATE is representative and shows a sample/model agreement for the operation of an Animal Shelter and Temporary Housing & Care for Animals with responsibilities of the sheltering organization and a Contract Municipality.

**Source:** The following TEMPLATE was created by Team Shelter USA ([teamshelterusa.com](http://teamshelterusa.com)) and Jbank Consulting ([jbankconsulting.com](http://jbankconsulting.com)). It is being shared for representational and viewing purposes only.

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Parties;

The Parties to this Agreement are ADD MUNICIPALITY, a governmental entity located in **city/county/state** hereinafter referred to as ADD MUNICIPALITY ABBREVIATION, and SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING, hereinafter referred to as **abbreviated name of shelter providing housing**, whose principal place of business is \_\_\_\_\_, and Purpose:

**Whereas**, SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shelter providing housing operated an Animal shelter and housing program for the ADD MUNICIPALITY since \_\_\_\_\_;

**Whereas** desires to continue its participation in the ongoing operation of animal housing, education, and programming for ADD MUNICIPALITY.

**Whereas** ADD MUNICIPALITY and SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING desire to partner to provide animal care, adoptions, animal services, and education to ADD MUNICIPALITY.

**Therefore**, The Parties hereby mutually agree as set out below.

**Term of Agreement:** This agreement shall commence on the **Effective Date xxx** and shall terminate **xxx** on the 3rd anniversary of the Effective Date unless sooner terminated by the provisions herein.

**SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING agrees:**

1. To provide a shelter facility and program that complies with all requirements of the Federal, State, and local ordinances for the operation of a Tennessee Animal Shelter that includes ALA Code 3-1-5 and Huntsville Code Chapter 5. The shelter will be run and staffed professionally according to industry standards as per the Association of Shelter Veterinarians *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* and *The Best Practice Playbook for Animal Shelters*. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will develop written policies and procedures and share them with ADD MUNICIPALITY.
2. To provide an Animal Shelter for housing and care of stray/lost dogs and cats delivered to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING by ADD

MUNICIPALITY and the public who live in the ADD MUNICIPALITY areas. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shelter providing housing the authority to accept, deny, or postpone entry to the shelter of owned animals from the ADD MUNICIPALITY based on space, adoptability, and animal health. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will link or provide resources to owners to assist with rehoming and foster care of owned cats and dogs and partner with Good Samaritan finders when appropriate. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will not accept the intake of healthy, altered, ear-tipped cats or wildlife unless injured, or part of a bite or animal cruelty case. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will maintain a website where they post pictures of animals impounded at the point of intake unless they are a dangerous dog or part of an enforcement case.

3. To provide an adequate facility and care that includes adequate housing, animal socialization and exercise, basic preventive care and emergency medical care including vaccinations upon intake, spay or neuter for adoption and reclaim, care of injured animals, deworming (as prescribed by a licensed veterinarian), and food and water as outlined by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians Shelter Guidelines.
4. To provide a quarantine and impoundment facility that complies with all requirements of the Federal, State, and local codes and all other relevant regulations, for the control of rabies and to house and care for any dog or cat ordered quarantined (if quarantine at home is not an option) by ADD MUNICIPALITY. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shelter providing housing the authority to modify these holding periods based on an animal's medical needs as indicated by a licensed veterinarian and as communicated to ADD MUNICIPALITY. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shelter providing housing the right to place an animal in foster care rather than housing at the shelter as designated by SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING written foster care policies. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING may euthanize without delay any animal that is suffering upon written determination by a licensed veterinarian or its director regardless of the holding time. This contract covers the cost of housing animals on hold as defined. Any additional hold time for special holds as outlined below and indicated in this contract will be billed separately to the ADD MUNICIPALITY;
  - i) Any stray/lost impounded dog, farm, exotic, reptile, small domestic mammal or bird without identification and over the age of 5 months will be held for \_\_\_ days to ensure the original owner can reclaim their animal.
  - ii) Animals impounded with identification including but not limited to a microchip, tag, or tattoo will be held for \_\_\_ days so the owner can be located. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will make and document every attempt to locate the owner of impounded

animals through telephone, and mail during the hold period.

- iii) Animals held for rabies/bite quarantine will be held for \_\_\_\_\_ days and will be observed for the disease by SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING. Any animal that is requested by ADD MUNICIPALITY or shows signs of rabies to be tested will be processed by SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING and will be billed separately for the service.
- iv) Disposition for any animal that is being held for a court case will be done within 5 business days. Animals will be held for 30 days at the shelter or in a suitable foster home after which time, ADD MUNICIPALITY will pay a daily rate as outlined in this contract.
- v) Police or abandonment holds will be held for \_\_\_ days. If no communication is received from ADD MUNICIPALITY, SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shelter providing housing the authority to make placement decisions according to their policy. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will assist with bullet removal, necropsies, and court cases as requested by ADD MUNICIPALITY and for an additional fee as outlined in this contract.
- vi) Animals held for animal cruelty investigations will be held for \_\_\_\_\_ days. If no communication is received by ADD MUNICIPALITY, SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shelter providing housing the authority to make placement decisions according to their policy. Animals will be held for \_\_\_\_\_ days at the shelter or in a suitable foster home after which time, ADD MUNICIPALITY will pay a daily rate as outlined in this contract.
- vii) SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will not impound healthy community cats that are ear-tipped. Furthermore, they have the authority to return (SHELTER/NEUTER/RETURN or SNR) any impounded healthy, community cat to the location of origin immediately after vaccination, spay/neuter, and ear-tipping without holding it for the stray period. Therefore, Animal control officers must report an accurate address/location of origin for the SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING staff. Any injured cat during business hours will be impounded and provided treatment as appropriate. Any unweaned cat or kitten under the age of five (5) months can be transferred to a foster home, a foster to adopt home or an approved 501c3 immediately. Any cat impounded as a hold will be held as identified above. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING may perform TRAP/NEUTER/RETURN OR TNR programs in ADD MUNICIPALITY areas which include setting, maintaining, and monitoring humane traps on ADD MUNICIPALITY property.

- viii) SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will only impound wild animals if they are injured or involved in a hold case as identified by ADD MUNICIPALITY. There is no hold time for these animals unless they are involved in a court case or they can be transferred immediately to an appropriate rehabilitator or sanctuary or euthanized based on a veterinarian's recommendations.
  - ix) SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will impound injured animals, underage animals, or community cats part of a TNR program during business hours only. ADD MUNICIPALITY is required to have a contract with a private veterinarian for injured animals after-hours. It is ADD MUNICIPALITY responsibility to transfer animals from a community veterinarian to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING. All medical information should be transferred with the animal during business hours. After-hour emergencies are addressed later in this contract.
5. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING retains the right to determine facility hours of operation as long as the shelter is open a minimum of 5 days a week (minus holidays). SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shelter providing housing the right to temporarily halt intake in case of disease outbreak and population control or the event of an emergency. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING reserves the right to close or reduce all operations to the public and Animal Control operations at its discretion. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will post on its website and Facebook page and communicate a plan to ADD MUNICIPALITY.
6. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will facilitate owner reclaims when a person comes to the facility or in the field on a case-by-case basis. Any animal reclaimed from SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will be spayed or neutered, given a vaccination, microchipped, and a license (if applicable) either immediately before they go home or at a later time mutually agreed upon by the owner or foster and SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING. The owner will pay reclaim fees as determined by this contract but SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shelter providing housing the authority to lower or waive the fee based on promotion or need. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING may temporarily transfer or place an injured, maimed, diseased, or shelter providing housing significant health condition or under age, immediately after intake, to an approved rescue or foster subject to the owner's rights of redemption within the minimum hold period. Any litter of two (2) or more kittens or puppies under the age of 5 months found running at large shall be made available for immediate adoption or other placement as determined by the director.
7. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will retain ownership of any domestic animal not reclaimed within the identified hold times. Once ownership is transferred, SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING can make immediate

placement decisions for said animal which may include adoptions, foster care, transfer to another organization, or euthanasia. Live outcomes will be the primary option when appropriate which may include foster, foster to adopt, adoption, transfer to an approved 501c3 organization, or reunification to an owner. Euthanasia will be a last resort and will be reserved for unsafe canines and medical cases. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shelter providing housing the authority to determine if an animal can be made available for adoption once the hold period is up unless otherwise communicated by ADD MUNICIPALITY to release or humanely euthanize the animal. Any animal adopted or reclaimed from SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will be spayed or neutered, given a vaccination, microchipped, and licensed if applicable, either immediately before they go home or at a later time mutually agreed upon by the owner or foster and SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING. The new owner may pay an adoption fee and an existing owner may pay a reclaim fee that is determined by SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING but SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shelter providing housing the authority to lower or waive fees.

8. To intake and dispose of dead animals brought to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING by members of the public and ADD MUNICIPALITY. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING can charge a fee for dead animals from owners.
9. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will keep computerized documentation of all intake, placement, and medical care. A monthly report will be provided to ADD MUNICIPALITY by SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING with statistics that include intake by species, intake by source (over the counter, brought in by ADD MUNICIPALITY, and outcome number (including adoptions, transfer, and euthanasia). SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will also publish an annual report (calendar year) providing aggregate annual statistics for all animals received and their outcomes. Reports shall be published on the SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING website for free with public access.
10. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will develop safety net programs and share them with ADD MUNICIPALITY as applicable that are designed to prevent animal intake, support pet owners, keep animals with their families, and provide care to those people and pets in need. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will also work through education programs, and marketing efforts to promote their partnership with ADD MUNICIPALITY and proactive programs. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will provide the dangerous dog and responsible pet care class to all add municipality residents for a fee determined in this contract.
11. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will provide temporary housing at the facility and in temporary shelters for domestic animals in the case of a declared emergency and as per the ADD MUNICIPALITY disaster relief plan.

12. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will provide training regarding animal handling, and safe medical practices including but not limited to giving vaccinations and inserting microchips, proactive animal control efforts for lost and found and other requested animal care and control needs to ADD MUNICIPALITY twice a year or more if requested.
13. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will rent traps to residents for the purpose of trapping feral unsocialized cats for TNR for a fee outlined in this contract.
14. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will offer residents of the Add municipality humane euthanasia services for an owned animal as per the fee noted in this contract.
15. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will sell pet licenses, if applicable, to the residents of ADD MUNICIPALITY with adoptions, reclaims and as requested.
16. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING will provide spay/neuter services to add municipality residents. (How will residents qualify? If sliding scale, what cost to constituents and how many will be done annually?)

**ADD MUNICIPALITY Agrees;**

1. To compensate SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING xxxx amount.
2. Options:
  - a) Calculate the lump sum needed for SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING to operate sheltering services and safety net (that includes community targeted spay/neuter) and divide by the number of the TOTAL pets helped in the shelter and through safety net or the TOTAL number of pets the shelter wants to help in the shelter and through safety net.
  - b) Set maximum length of stay for each category of pet, such as court cases, after which time ADD MUNICIPALITY pays per day.
3. To designate SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING as authorized to house animals on behalf of ADD MUNICIPALITY, to charge fees, to act as a local Rabies Control Authority representative, and to provide placement for animals which includes but is not limited to adoptions, foster care, transfer, and euthanasia.
4. ADD MUNICIPALITY will transport animals to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING in a safe, clean, and humane manner. Each truck compartment will have appropriate ventilation with slip-proof mats and be sanitized between individual animals using an approved veterinary-grade disinfectant

that prevents infectious disease transmission. The trucks will be equipped with leashes, control poles, nets, blankets, transport cages, and other equipment to ensure the animal control officers use the least amount of excessive force possible to move an animal so that the animal and human stay safe and fear is minimized. An animal control pole will only be used if necessary. A dead animal will not be transported in the same compartment as a live animal. An animal showing signs of a contagious disease will not be transported in the same compartment as an animal that appears healthy. ADD MUNICIPALITY will include in their truck tools to help get animals home and to assist pet owners in need including but not limited to microchip scanners, leashes, pet food, and educational information on assistance programs.

5. ADD MUNICIPALITY agrees to provide training to their Animal Control Officers for the safe and humane control of animals and the SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING processes. ADD MUNICIPALITY agrees to train each Animal Control Officer in the proper preparation and communication of the necessary documentation and information when dropping off animals at SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING. ADD MUNICIPALITY will record pertinent information and share them with SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING including pick-up location, circumstances of pick-up and hold requirements, owner information, and animal information including special markings, needs, or identification.
6. ADD MUNICIPALITY agrees to follow all policies and procedures for intake and programs as developed by SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING and approved by ADD MUNICIPALITY. Upon intake, ADD MUNICIPALITY will provide all known information/history about the animal to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING including, alerting SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING of issues or abnormalities, location/person connected to the pet, phone numbers, and description of the pet. ADD MUNICIPALITY will assist in the administration of vaccinations and help restrain animals as requested by SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING.
7. ADD MUNICIPALITY will work towards returning animals to their rightful owner in the field before bringing the animals to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING. This will include scanning an animal with a microchip scanner and researching a microchip, reviewing the animal for a tag or other form of identification, asking neighbors/knocking on doors when applicable, and returning animals to their homes when an owner is identified. ADD MUNICIPALITY will encourage and allow good samaritan finders to foster animals instead of impoundment.
8. ADD MUNICIPALITY will not impound owned animals unless they determine that there is a holding case or emergency including a bite or quarantine, a cruelty investigation, other police matter or if it is in the best interest of the animal.

9. ADD MUNICIPALITY will only impound a cat if they are injured, in distress, or sick, the situation is unsafe for the animal or the animal is involved in a bite. ADD MUNICIPALITY will return all healthy, ear-tipped cats to the pick-up location before bringing them to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING. Any animals in distress will be taken to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING or a private veterinary hospital after hours. ADD MUNICIPALITY will coordinate with SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING to return any community cats, socialized/friendly or unsocialized/feral to their original location after they are spayed/neutered, ear-tipped, and vaccinated.
10. ADD MUNICIPALITY will not bring wildlife to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING unless the animal is injured or involved in a bite. ADD MUNICIPALITY will attempt to bring such animals to a rehabilitation setting whenever possible, if appropriate.
11. ADD MUNICIPALITY will impound stray/lost dogs and injured dogs and cats to the SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING during regular business hours **as per Standard Operating Procedure**. After-hour impounds will be accepted as follows;
  - a) After-hours are defined as 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. during the week and from 5 p.m. Friday through 8 a.m. Monday.
  - b) Emergencies are defined as; an aggressive animal, an animal involved in a bite, an injured animal, an owner incapacitated / unavailable during an emergency or incarceration, a traffic emergency/blockage, an animal cruelty case, or a disaster. To impound an animal after hours, MUNICIPALITY (add process)
  - c) After-hour medical emergencies picked up by ADD MUNICIPALITY are required to be transferred to a private veterinarian contracted by ADD MUNICIPALITY. It is ADD MUNICIPALITY responsibility to follow up and transfer from said animal hospital to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING during business hours if needed. All medical information must accompany the animal and be provided to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING at the time of the transfer. On intake of an animal, ADD MUNICIPALITY will provide all known information/history to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING.
12. ADD MUNICIPALITY will collect data and send a monthly report to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING that includes the following; Number of calls, Type of calls, ACO response, number of calls resulting in impoundment, returned to owner in the field, and number of animals in field foster care.
13. ADD MUNICIPALITY will strive towards immediate and quick resolution of holding cases. They will communicate about cases to SHELTER

PROVIDING HOUSING before or during the last day the animal is expected to be on hold.

14. ADD MUNICIPALITY will take pictures of all animals picked up that are not on hold or subject to a court case at the time of intake and will post them before arrival to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING on a public lost and found social media site. Upon intake Animal Control Officers will vaccinate each animal. (add process)
15. ADD MUNICIPALITY will partner with SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING regarding safety net programs as applicable to prevent animal intake including community cat programs, support for pet owners, keeping animals in families, and providing care to those people and pets in need. This includes posting pictures and information of lost/found, animals for adoption, spay/neuter, and other services on social media sites and websites, identifying ways to promote programs to ADD MUNICIPALITY residents, developing multi-agency/department relationships, and partnering on outreach efforts such as tabling, spay/neuter, microchip and vaccination clinics, etc.
16. ADD MUNICIPALITY agrees to establish methods of communication between ADD MUNICIPALITY and SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING every month or as needed to address challenges, complaints, or process improvements.

## TERMS OF SERVICE

1. **Compensation by ADD MUNICIPALITY:** ADD MUNICIPALITY agrees to make the following payments to the SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING for all services as outlined above for animals placed in the care of SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING by ADD MUNICIPALITY or public citizens and agreed upon safety net programs.
2. **Payment schedule:** Boarding charges and euthanasia reimbursements will be paid within thirty (30) days of billing. Fees from licensing will be paid quarterly within sixty (60) days from the end of the quarter in which they are collected.
3. **Type of Payment:** Monthly payment ...Public fee Schedule ADD MUNICIPALITY needs to establish fees and all fees collected shall be deposited into a separate fund to be used solely for the animal control shelter program. *May include:*

<i>Impoundment</i>	<i>Vaccinations</i>
<i>Boarding</i>	<i>Medical (emergency, heartworm)</i>
<i>Sterilization</i>	<i>Owner surrender</i>
<i>Adoption</i>	<i>Disposal</i>
<i>Microchip plus</i>	<i>Classes-Dangerous Dog and PAWS- \$100 and</i>

registration	\$25
Euthanasia	

After holding fee including:

Rabies/head	Extra days beyond holding for hold cases
Court	Do you charge for animals once they belong to SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING
Necropsy	Gas for transfer
Bullet Removal	Traps \$25 refundable deposit

Other items to consider

- Who pays for processing of community cats before release (s/n, ear-tipp, etc.)?
  - Are there extra fees for head, bullet removal, reports/testifying?
  - Is there a yearly cost of living increase?
4. **Insurance** SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shall maintain the following insurance coverage and shall provide the ADD MUNICIPALITY with certificates of insurance, naming the ADD MUNICIPALITY as additional insured on all of the following policies a) general liability b)automotive liability
  5. **Audit** ADD MUNICIPALITY, at its own expense, may audit the financial records of SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING from time to time from the latest fiscal year for transactions involving expenditures of funds arising under this contract.
  6. **Collection of fines and fees:** SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shall be responsible for the collection of all fines, fees, and other charges to the owners of animals, provided however, SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shall cooperate with ADD MUNICIPALITY in such matters, including but not limited to requiring proof of payment of such sums by owners of impounded animals. Any ADD MUNICIPALITY or SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING Agent or officer may request or authorize the release of an impounded animal to its owner and waive any or all impound, vaccination, or boarding fees. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING agrees not to bill ADD MUNICIPALITY for any waived fees.
  7. **Assignment:** SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING may not assign its rights or responsibilities under this Agreement without the prior written consent of ADD MUNICIPALITY.
  8. **Entire Agreement:** This constitutes the entire agreement between the parties. Any modifications hereto must be in writing and signed by both parties.
  9. **Compensation From Other Sources:** Nothing herein shall restrict SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING right to collect compensation from other sources for services provided to them. Nothing herein shall prohibit ADD MUNICIPALITY from charging the owners of animals more than that which ADD MUNICIPALITY pays to

SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING.

10. **Mutual Indemnification:** Both parties agree to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless each other from any liability, its officers, agents, employees, or others acting on behalf of each other for personal injury

property damage arising from services provided hereunder, except where caused in whole or in part by the negligence or willful misconduct of its officers, agents, employees or others acting on behalf of each other. Each party agrees to indemnify, defend, and hold each other harmless from any liability of its officers, agents, employees, or others acting on behalf of each other for any personal injury or property damage caused by the alleged or actual negligence or willful misconduct, or arising from any claim made by a member of the public as a result action taken under this agreement, or in enforcing of any state or local laws about animals, which animals cause to come into the physical possession.

11. **Not A Joint Venture:** Nothing herein shall be deemed to have created a joint venture or partnership between SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING and ADD MUNICIPALITY. Neither shall be considered to be a principal or agent of the other as a result of this Agreement.
12. **Authority To Execute Agreement:** Each of the signers below warrants that he/she shelter providing housing been authorized by the governing board of the party for which he/she is signing this Agreement to execute the same for the party.
13. **Animal Control Official Not Required:** SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING right to compensation hereunder shall not be dependent on whether or not ADD MUNICIPALITY continues to employ an Animal Control Officer.
14. **Termination:** Neither SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING nor ADD MUNICIPALITY shall terminate this agreement nor take any adverse action against the other party without first giving written notice of the problem and advising the other party of its right to cure such problem. If the party corrects or cures the problem within the specified 30-day period, then no adverse action related to this Agreement shall be taken by either participant. Notwithstanding, SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING or ADD MUNICIPALITY may terminate this Agreement with or without cause by providing a 90-day written notice to the other party.
15. **Employees:** SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shall be responsible in full for the payment of its employees, including Worker's Compensation, insurance, payroll deductions, and all related costs.
16. **Modification:** Modifications to this agreement shall be in writing, shall be executed in the same manner as this agreement, and shall become effective on the date of the last signature to the modification.
17. **No Discrimination:** SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shall ensure that all of its employees act in a professional and businesslike manner. No rude or unseemly



actions or attitudes shall be tolerated in day-to-day dealings with the public. SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING shall not discriminate either in dealing with its employees or the public at large, because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, handicap, or age.

18. **Litigation:** It is the intent of the parties that litigation be avoided and to allow for quick resolution of any disputes, the parties hereby agree that any claims, demands, or disputes that cannot be amicably resolved between the parties upon written request by either party shall be submitted within two weeks to a neutral, trained party for assistance in dispute resolution using non-binding mediation. If mediation efforts are unsuccessful, parties may resort to protecting their rights by litigation in district court. Said neutral third party should, if possible, be a local person with a background in dispute resolution and subject law. If the parties cannot agree on a neutral third party, then they shall submit the process to the American Arbitration Association for the selection of a neutral third party and the accomplishment of dispute resolution, by its guidelines.
19. **Extension:** This agreement may be extended for an additional \_\_\_ year period by mutual written agreement of the parties but will not automatically renew upon expiration of the current term.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF THE ADD MUNICIPALITY and *SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING* have executed this Agreement as of the date first above written.

**SHELTER PROVIDING HOUSING**

**THE MUNICIPALITY**

By \_\_\_\_\_

By \_\_\_\_\_

Authorized Signer

Authorized Signer

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Quick-Start Guide to AI for Animal Welfare Professionals

#### Provided by Outcomes for Pets

Artificial intelligence is rapidly becoming a practical tool for animal welfare organizations. The following guide from Kristen Hassen provides a simple starting point for professionals interested in exploring how AI can support shelter operations.

The best way to learn AI is to, in the words of professor and AI expert Ethan Mollick, “invite it to the table.” The more you use AI for both personal and professional tasks, the faster you will understand its power and potential.

Whether we like it or not, AI is changing how we work and live. Developing a basic level of familiarity with these tools will be increasingly important for animal welfare professionals.

Animal shelters are already using AI to:

- Augment customer service to ensure consistent and accurate responses
- Develop marketing and communications campaigns
- Write and update policies, procedures, and other organizational documents
- Analyze and better use shelter data
- Streamline animal movement through the system to reduce length of stay
- Help reunite lost pets with their families more quickly
- Edit images without altering the appearance of the animal
- Manage risk and improve operational safety

If you're just getting started or training others, these tips can make learning AI easier and more productive.

## 1. Start with one or two large language models (LLMs)

Large language models include tools such as Anthropic's **Claude**, **Google Gemini**, and **ChatGPT**. Platforms like **Microsoft Copilot** also use these models and are commonly approved for use by governments and nonprofits.

It can be helpful to try more than one platform so you can compare results. When starting out, consider using paid versions (typically around \$20 per month), since many advanced features are only available to paid users.

## 2. Provide context

One of the most common beginner mistakes is uploading a document and asking AI to simply "make it better."

AI performs much better when you provide context. If you want help designing a web page, show the AI an example of a page you like and ask it to create something similar. If you need help writing a board report, provide a previous report, explain the audience, and describe the key message you want readers to remember.

The more context and detail you provide, the better the results will be.

## 3. Use the right tool for the task

Different AI tools excel at different things. Some are particularly strong at writing and editing documents, others at image editing, coding, or data analysis.

For example, at the time of this writing, Claude performs well with written documents, while Google Gemini often excels at image editing. If you're unsure which tool is best for a project, you can search online or ask an AI-powered search engine like **Perplexity** something like: "*What is the best AI tool for creating videos?*"

You may see advertisements, but you will also find useful comparisons of tools suited for specific tasks.

## 4. Be clear about the outcome you want

Sometimes you may ask AI to complete a task and receive several pages of technically correct information that still doesn't match what you were hoping for.

When this happens, pause and ask yourself what result you actually wanted. Often the issue is that the prompt lacked context, the goal wasn't clearly defined, or the question itself needed to be reframed.

If necessary, start a new conversation and clarify your request. AI can usually reach the right result, but it often requires clearer direction from the user.

## 5. If you're stuck, ask AI for help

If you get stuck using an AI platform, ask the tool itself for guidance.

For example, when analyzing shelter data in a platform like Claude or Julius, you might ask: “*What data points would best show meaningful changes in intake and outcomes?*”

The AI can often suggest useful analyses or data points you may not have considered.

## 6. Always check your work

AI can sometimes “hallucinate,” meaning it may generate incorrect information or fabricate sources.

**Two things should always be verified:**

First, confirm that the information produced by the AI is supported by research and data. You can improve accuracy by asking the AI to research specific sources before responding.

Second, **always check citations.** AI can sometimes generate references that sound real but do not actually exist.

For example, when helping a student create a foster manual for cats and kittens, we instructed the AI to use the **Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines** and the **Maddie’s Million Pet Challenge** as source material. This resulted in a much stronger document aligned with current expert guidance.

## 7. Learn basic AI concepts

A few foundational concepts can make AI tools easier to use:

- **Prompting** is how we ask AI to perform tasks.
- **Large language models (LLMs)** are the underlying systems that power many AI platforms.
- **Chatbots** are interfaces that allow users to interact with these models through text or voice.

AI terminology continues to evolve. Listening to podcasts such as *The AI Daily Brief*, *How I AI*, or *Hard Fork* can help you stay familiar with emerging concepts and trends.

The more comfortable you become with these tools, the easier and more enjoyable they are to use.

## 8. Balance benefits with risk

Many AI platforms integrate with email, calendars, and cloud-based drives. While these integrations can be convenient, they can also create risks when handling sensitive information.

Avoid sharing personal data such as Social Security numbers, passwords, human resources files, or other confidential information with AI systems.

Some organizations are developing formal AI-use policies that define approved platforms, training requirements, and guidelines for data sharing.

While it is important to understand and mitigate potential risks, completely banning or severely restricting AI may have unintended consequences. As AI becomes more integrated into everyday work, the best protection is **learning how to use it responsibly, safely, and effectively.**