

Shelter Self-Assessment Tool for Increasing Positive Outcomes for (Big) Dogs

Are you doing everything you can to give all your dogs a shot at being adopted, returned to their owners, or sent to rescue? This self-assessment checklist can help your organization identify if there are any programs or procedures you can add to benefit every dog in your shelter, especially those larger breeds who can be the toughest to find positive outcomes for.

Intake Prevention

- Are your animal services officers doing [return-to-owner in the field for strays](#) and [providing resources](#) to the public for their dogs (e.g., collars, leashes, fencing, kennels)?
 - [Lifesaving dispatch tips, how to do away with the punishment-based model, RTO in the field for dogs without ID, and more.](#)
 - [Rethink how your shelter approaches RTO.](#)
- Is your shelter staff [counseling people on ways to keep their dogs](#)?
- Have you implemented a [strategic intake program](#) (aka [managed intake](#))?
 - [How to switch to a managed intake model.](#)
- Have you started a [foster finder program](#) to encourage people who find strays to temporarily foster them and assist in locating the owner?
- Are you hosting [microchip and vaccine clinics](#) in the community to improve return-to-owner rates and the health of people's pets?
- Are you able to support low- or no-cost spay/neuter efforts to reduce the number of dogs needing homes?
 - [Use the Spay/Neuter Resource Map](#) to identify clinics in your area.
 - [Close the gap to access to veterinary care.](#)
- Are you [using data to identify "hot spots"](#) and planning pre-emptive programs to support those communities?
 - [Putting data into action.](#)

- [Register for Shelter Pet Data Alliance](#), which can automatically download and analyze your data for you.

Lost/Found

- Are you providing [the latest info about how to find lost pets](#) to the public?
- Do you have [volunteers who can try to match stray animals](#) to found animal resources?
- Have you made information about the stray dogs in your facility available to the public?
Can the public access the kennel area where you are holding strays?
- Are you posting information about all strays on your [shelter's website and social media](#), community websites, social media, [national lost/found systems](#)?
- Have you considered adding a [Geographic Information System \(GIS\) map](#) to visualize where animals have been lost or found?

Pathway Planning

- Do you have [fast-track planning](#) in place?
- Are you [identifying the most at-risk animals](#) upon intake?
- Have you thought about where the animal will be housed in the shelter to optimize their length of stay and reduce stress?
- Are you aware of your [shelter's capacity for care](#)?
- Are medical exams and vaccines happening immediately on intake?
- Have you scanned for a microchip multiple times?
- Have you scheduled spay/neuter, regardless of adoption status?
- Is the animal photographed on intake and again once they have decompressed?
- Is the animal posted as available immediately when the stray hold ends?
- Do you have [actionable daily rounds](#) in place?
- Are you collecting daily observations and intake notes from ACOs, staff, and volunteers?

- Are you tracking interactions with the dog throughout their stay at the facility via interactions with volunteers, staff, fosters, etc.?
- Are you putting notes in your shelter software system, or another communication tool like [Trello or Slack](#) to ensure all staff can utilize them to make decisions?
- Does your staff have an awareness of the average [length of stay](#) for your dogs, as well as which individual dogs have been there the longest?
- Does your staff have regular meetings to brainstorm strategies for long-stay animals?

Volunteer, Foster, and Rescue Relationships

- Are you [training/onboarding new volunteers](#) in a timely manner?
- Do you have volunteers and staff willing to advocate for individual dogs?
- Do you have [a robust foster program?](#)
- Have you set up a [special foster program](#) for big/challenging dogs?
- Have you considered partnering with local businesses that will allow [employees to bring shelter dogs to work?](#)
- Have you considered setting up a [foster program with a local prison?](#)
- Have you [trained your foster parents on how to find homes](#) for the shelter pets in their temporary care? Are your foster parents allowed to facilitate adoptions?
- Do you have relationships with [rescue partners](#) whom you can contact upon intake to see if they can take dogs?
- Have you considered trading dogs with another organization?
- Have you explored setting up a [regular transport program?](#)
- Do you utilize breed-specific rescues when the need arises?

Behavior and Enrichment

- Is the dog [getting daily enrichment](#) (e.g., snuffle mats, feeder puzzles, nose work, Kongs, pup cups, auditory enrichment)

- Is a staff member or volunteer assigned to work with individual dogs? Are they [trained to manage dogs with reactivity](#)? [Common obedience issues](#)?
- Have you implemented [playgroups](#)?
- Does the dog have an undeserved bad reputation? Are you [treating every dog like an individual](#)?
- Do you have a [behavior modification plan](#) in place if deemed necessary?
- Have you consulted a vet or trainer about the dog's behavior?
- Have you considered pairing challenging dogs with a "role model" dog to positively influence behavior (using safe introductions)?

Marketing

- Do you have [good photos of the dog](#) with a person, by itself, of their body and of their face, with a toy, in a home environment?
- Do you have [any video of the dog](#) with people, other dogs, with toys?
- Does the dog do anything super cute you can use to [promote the dog on social media](#)?
- Do you have a [positive biography written for the pet](#)?
- Have you [removed all breed labels](#) from your marketing materials and cage cards?
- Have you [redesigned your cage cards with more helpful information](#) for adopters?
- Have you reached out to [local media outlets](#) for promotion? [National](#)?
- Are you utilizing volunteers to update your profiles, videos, and photos?
- Do your staff help promote animals on [social media](#)?
- Do you have regular [adoption events](#) and are you advertising them?
- Have you held any evening adoption events?
- Are you consistently marketing for volunteers and [fosters](#)? Are [you offering volunteers a variety of jobs](#) tailored to their skills?
- Have you changed the dog's name to provide a "clean slate" for him?

Adoptions

- Is everyone who is doing adoptions [comfortable with/appropriately equipped](#) to handle the animals (e.g., dress code, access to gear, body language and behavior training)?
- Do you provide support and information about [helping the dog transition to their home](#)?
- Do you provide the adopter with trainer info, including virtual options [\(e.g., good pup\)](#)?
- Are adopters [afraid if they return the animal](#), they won't be able to adopt a different one?
- Does the enrichment plan make sense for the adopter to continue? Can you modify it so they can continue working with the dog?
- Do you have a [daily staff stand-up meeting](#) to review operational items that affect the shelter (e.g., findings from rounds, which staff members are out for the week, shifted responsibilities)?
- Do you have [good client services](#) and communications practices in place?
- Do you [practice open adoptions](#)?
- Have you reviewed your adoption application and [removed all barriers](#)?
 - Does that include doing away with landlord/home checks and vet references?
- Have you considered [reducing or waiving adoption fees](#)?
- Are you limiting the public's ability to meet pets by requiring an appointment to adopt?
- Is your adoptions team [comfortable handling all dogs](#) in the shelter?
- Are there volunteers/staff available to answer questions about individual dogs?
- Are you practicing foster-to-adopt?
- Are potential adopters allowed to do a trial adoption, [take a dog overnight, or take them on field trips](#)?
- Have you tried to implement a [short-term fostering program so dogs can go to a home over the holidays](#)?
- Do you allow dogs to go home with adopters the same day?
- Are you open to the public during hours they can come and visit? Late night? Early morning?

- Have you provided resources to the public about how to communicate with their landlord about barriers to pet ownership (e.g., [dog resume](#)) or considered offering a pet deposit program to help cover high deposit fees?
- Does your shelter ever assist directly with getting landlords to change their policies?
 - [My Pit Bull is Family](#) has tips for landlords and tenants, info on pet-friendly insurance companies, etc.
- Do your adoptions team know how to verify that adopters understood their instructions?
- Do you have an official follow-up process you use with adopters to see how things are going, such as [the 3-3-3 rule](#)?

Culture and Community Relationships

- Do you have a [company culture](#) where staff trust one another?
- Do your staff [trust the public enough to adopt to them](#)?
- Does your community trust you? Would they agree that [you are transparent about what goes on in the shelter](#)?
- Do you think your community sees your shelter as a place to adopt a pet?
- Do you solicit feedback from the public on ways to improve or add to your services?
- Are you offering community programs ([e.g., pet food pantry](#)) to build positive relationships?
- Is your shelter actively involved in the community to [change ordinances](#) related to breed bans?