

Return to Home CHALLENGE



Return to Home (Owner) Marketing and Communications Guide *Return to Home Challenge*

We know that reuniting lost/stray dogs with their families is something your organization cares about and is critical to supporting your community. We all want lost/stray pets to get back to their families sooner. This guide will help you speak clearly and consistently about what actions your community should take if they find or lose a pet, and what actions your shelter is taking to get more pets back to their families. Use this guide as a checklist for the content and resources needed to effectively communicate return to home guidelines and policies to all types of audiences.

How to Get Started

Internal Communications

- ❑ **Key Message:** Develop a central message point that resonates with staff and effectively conveys information about the Return to Home policy and guidelines.
- ❑ **Training Sessions:** Host interactive training sessions with Q&A where staff members can learn about the policy in-depth, ask questions, and participate in discussions. [Train staff](#) and volunteers in the importance of how Return to Home (Owner) impacts overall intake numbers and can help with save rates. Use visual aids, case studies and role-playing exercises to enhance understanding.
- ❑ **Email and/or Newsletter Announcement:** Send a detailed email to staff, volunteers, fosters, and other stakeholders outlining the new policy. Include the reason and objectives for the new policy, key changes, and implementation timeline. Provide links to relevant documents and resources such as this [Return to Home Playbook](#).
- ❑ **Flyer:** Create an announcement flyer that concisely summarizes the Return to Home policy, emphasizing its benefits. Post in common staff areas, such as the breakroom or bulletin boards.
- ❑ **FAQ:** Compile a list of frequently asked questions about the new Return to Home policies and guidelines, categorizing them into relevant topics such as the steps officers take in the field, and how these fit into your overall save rates. This will serve as a reference for staff to ensure consistent understanding and implementation throughout the organization.

External Communications

- ❑ **Website:** Explain your Return to Home policy and prominently display guidelines for families who lost or found a pet on your organization's website with a link to the steps to take and reclaim webpages. If your organization can reduce or waive reclaim fees, make sure that it is displayed clearly and kept up to date on your website.
- ❑ **Social Media:** Post on each platform, clearly and concisely explaining what to do if you lost or found a pet. You can use [these eye-catching infographics](#) to do so. Post English, Spanish, or another language versions, when applicable to your community. Additional visuals could be created in [Canva](#), a free design tool that enables users to create graphics, flyers, and more. In addition, explain any new Return to Home practices you're trying during the challenge such as Petco Love Lost reports or microchipping events. Make sure you have tapped a staff member or trusted volunteer to monitor these channels and answer any questions that arise. Templated answers can go a long way.
- ❑ **Google Listing:** Go to [your Business Profile](#) and sign in to the Google Account associated with it. Verify that your hours, location, and contact information are correct. If you haven't [claimed your organization on Google](#), make sure to do so.
- ❑ **Press Release:** By issuing a press release to your local media, you can reach a broader audience beyond your organization's existing network. Let them know about your participation in the challenge and the best practices for getting lost pets home. A press release should include:
 - A headline and good photo of a pet being reunited with their person. The headline should succinctly summarize Return to Home and grab the reader's attention. For tips on high quality photos, check out [HeARTs Speak's Easy Tips for Great Shelter Pet Photos](#).
 - A brief introduction that provides context for the 'why' and 'how' of Return to Home best practices, for example.
 - An overview of the benefits such as avoiding reclaim fees and the need to pick up your animal.
 - 1-2 supportive quotes from shelter staff, board members, or other relevant stakeholders.
 - Your location and address should be included in all outreach materials and spots, for example, "If you do have to make a shelter trip, make sure to check address and hours first," to ensure it's easy for your community to come in and reclaim their pets.
 - A boilerplate paragraph should appear at the end of the press release which provides information about your organization.

Ongoing External Communications

- ❑ **Spread the Word on Social Media:** Continuing to post about best practices for lost and found pets is essential for getting more lost pets in your community. Try doing a ride along with an officer and capture some of these new practices into action. Post photos of pets being reunited with their family due to one of these practices, with clever videos, or engaging graphics to accompany the explanations. Consider paid social media ads to expand your audience reach beyond your current audience. If you can add a few dollars, boost your posts. You can start with as little as \$1 a day [on Meta](#) (Facebook & Instagram).
- ❑ **Engage Your Local Media:** Local media love a feel-good story from their community. [Consider pitching the local media](#) with stories of lost pets who have made it back home, and how they did it. These stories should include good reunion photos or videos to grab attention. A good reunion photo should have the following:

emotion, no cages or chains, a good vantage point of the person and animal. Keep background in mind, like business signs, for example. Don't be afraid to ask the pets' family to hug them again to get more shots, increasing chances of a good one! Build a media contact list and keep it updated so when it is time to engage the local media, you can easily send a press release or pitch out.

- ❑ **Collaborate with Local Businesses and Neighbors:** If you collaborate with the community where the pet was found, you will find some of your best resources are neighbors. Immediately connect with neighbors and businesses in the area. If field officers can't find clues to the pets' home from there, follow up a bit later and see if there is a local neighborhood restaurant that will allow you to put up a sign about the lost pet. Area Veterinarian's Offices almost always have boards for this kind of information. Stop by regularly and make sure information stays current.
- ❑ **Utilize Volunteers:** Ask your volunteers to post about Return to Home best practices and answer questions on NextDoor or other local social media channels.
- ❑ **Local Events:** Check for community outreach events and ask if you can have a small table for public information. Have your colorful flyers, reunion photos and be ready to talk pets and Return to Home! Everyone loves talking about their animals! Pick your most friendly, outgoing volunteers/staff for these types of ongoing outreach!

Sources

- [Effective social media boosting strategies for 2023 | Vendasta](#)
- [Social Media: What You Need To Know About Paid Social | MUD Marketing Resource Kit](#)
- [22 Facebook Marketing Tips for Small Businesses on a Budget | WordStream](#)
- [Edit your Business Profile on Google | Google Business Profile Help](#)
- [Create an event for your Facebook Page | Meta Business Help Center](#)
- [How to create an event ad from your Facebook Page | Meta Business Help Center](#)
- [How to Use TikTok - 2023 Beginners Tutorial | YouTube](#)
- [Get Started Meta Advertising | Meta Business Help Center](#)
- [How to boost posts on Facebook | Meta Business Help Center](#)