

Partner Up Challenge

SAVING LIVES TOGETHER



Transfer/Transport & Adoptions Marketing & Communications Guide

April 2025 / Partner Up Challenge

Welcoming your community with inclusive, conversation-based adoptions and a non-judgmental experience ensures that you make the most of your local base of adopters. Open adoption practices, paired with a strong transfer/transport program are an important part of a progressive shelter or rescue's lifesaving strategy. The programs should co-exist together in your local animal welfare ecosystem:

For government shelters, you can 1) increase adoptions through open adoption practices, and 2) supplement your live outcomes through transfers out.

For rescues and private shelters, as you're able to 1) increase adoptions through open adoption practices, you can also 2) increase the support you're able to offer your local government shelter(s) through transfers in because you'll have more space, and more confidence in your ability to place those pets.

How each shelter implements these programs can be different, depending upon their own needs and the community they serve. This checklist is intended to serve as a guide, not a to-do list! You'll find content and resources that will help you effectively communicate policies and programs to both internal and external audiences.

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Talk To Your Team About It:

- **Key Message:** Develop a central message point to serve as consistency in communication, resonate with the intended audience, and effectively convey the desired narrative or information about the changes you're implementing.
- **Email and/or Newsletter Announcement:** Send a detailed email to staff, volunteers, fosters, and other internal stakeholders outlining the new open adoption policy and changes to your transfer/transport program. Include the reason and objectives for the new policy and programs, key changes, and implementation timeline. Provide links to relevant documents and resources such as:
 - [Adoptions Training Playbook](#)
 - [Adoptions Training Module](#)
 - [Lifesaving Through Transport Training Module](#)
 - ["Responsible Transport" Best Friends Podcast episode](#)
 - [Training resource for conversation-based adoption](#)
 - [Reducing Infectious Disease in Transport Playbook](#)
- **Flyer for breakroom and staff areas:** Create an announcement flyer that concisely summarizes the open adoption policy and explains the changes or additions you're making to your transfer/transport program.
- **Training Sessions with Q&A:** [Train staff and volunteers on the importance of screening](#) vs. putting up barriers.
- **FAQ:** Compile a list of frequently asked questions about the new open adoption policy and transfer/transport program for your team to refer to. [This sample FAQ document](#) that Muddy Paws Rescue shared with their staff is a good example.

Talk To Your Community About It:

- **Website:**
 - Open Adoptions: Feature a prominent announcement or banner on the homepage to notify visitors about the new open adoption policy, with a link to the adoption page explaining the open adoption policy and assuring them they are welcome. Include any updates to adoption fees ([reduced or fee waived](#)), expanded adoption hours, and same day adoptions.

- Muddy Paws Rescue [explains its open adoption policy](#) under their Community, People, and Partnerships section.under their Community, People, and Partnerships section.
 - Transfer/Transport: Use your website’s foster page to let the public know you need foster parents to support your transfer and/or transport program.
 - Make it easy for people to sign up to become foster parents, similar to how your open adoption process should work—without long waiting periods or invasive steps like home visits and background checks. If your shelter/rescue software allows it, you can create an iframe of pets who need foster homes, such as pets who have been accepted on the next transport.
 - If you have volunteer opportunities that are specific to your transport program, list those on your volunteer page, along with any specialized training or orientation required to get involved.
 - Create a page just for rescue partners to invite them to partner with you and transparently explain your partnership parameters, like this example from [Baltimore Animal Rescue & Care Shelter](#).
- **Social Media Platforms:** Create a dedicated announcement posts on your social media channels to introduce the new open adoption policy and/or your transfer and/or transport programs and emphasize any need for fosters. Use eye-catching visuals such as photos of adoptable pets, clever videos, and engaging graphics to accompany the announcement. These visuals could be created in [Canva](#), a free, intuitive design tool that enables users to create graphics, flyers, and more.
 - Keep messages in your posts welcoming, concise, and easy to understand.
 - Consider using both English and Spanish language assets if applicable to your community.
 - Paid social media ads may expand your audience reach beyond your current network of followers and supporters. Bookmark these resources for steps to boost your content on each channel: [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [TikTok Promote](#).
- **Press Release:** By issuing a press release to your local media, you can reach a broader audience beyond your organization’s existing network, including potential adopters, community members, and stakeholders. [Bookmark this resource for free press release templates and examples](#).
 - [See this sample news story that media picked up from a press release](#).
- **Onsite Signage:** Consider making banners or signs that welcome and encourage same day adoptions and fostering opportunities, promote any reduced or waived adoption fees you offer, and notify visitors of any expanded hours you may have.
 - **Source shelters:** think about a sign promoting “short-term transport fosters” as an option for people who may be open to fostering a pet with a definite end date.

- **Receiving shelters:** If you use fosters for transfers or transports, you can utilize onsite signage to promote the need.
- **Check Google Listing:** Ensure your hours are updated to reflect any changes. Edit your Business Profile [using this step-by-step tutorial](#). If you haven't claimed your organization on Google, use [this guide](#) to learn how. to learn how.
- **Check Third-Party Sites:** Confirm complete and accurate listings on third party sites such as [Petfinder](#) and [Adopt-a-Pet](#).

Marketing Resources to Support Adoptions and Transfer/Transport

Effective marketing can support you in your efforts to save lives by increasing awareness of the adoptable pets in your care, as well as your operational needs like rescue partners, volunteers, fosters, and wish list items for transport. Consider leveraging these resources for effective strategies and compelling storytelling ideas:

- **On-Kennel Signage:** When you have a certain pathway you'd like to promote for a pet, consider using their kennel card/signage to alert visitors to how they can best help that pet. Some shelter software programs allow you to customize kennel cards. Another way to indicate these animals' status is with a sticker on the kennel card. You can even include a [scannable QR code](#) on the kennel card or kennel sign.
 - **Pre-Market Pets on Stray-Hold:** The marketing of pets in your care does not have to wait until their stray hold is up. While you hope to find the pet's original family, you can start taking steps to pre-market those pets while they are on stray hold if they are not reclaimed. This will help you to fast track some pets through your shelter and give the pet a head start on finding a new home if their original family does not claim them.
 - **Market Pets in Need of Transport Fosters:** As a source shelter, once you've identified pets to go on an upcoming transport, it is often ideal to get them out of the shelter and into foster as soon as possible. Indicate on their kennel that they need a transport foster home for a specific amount of time.
- **Get Good Photos and Videos:** Often potential adopters' or rescue partners' first encounter with an adoptable pet is online. Capturing great photos (and replacing intake photos) and videos of the pets in your care can make a lifesaving difference. For tips on how to create web-worthy photos check out [Hearts Speak's Easy Tips for Great Shelter Pet Photos](#). Including a video of the dog interacting with other dogs, [like this example from Memphis Animal Services](#), can make them more likely to be chosen by receiving rescue and transport partners.
- **Market Pets in Foster Homes:** Empower your fosters to begin marketing their foster pets to their network and community as soon as possible to expedite the pet finding an adoptive

home. By doing this you more quickly support the pet's transition from shelter to adoptive home and open the foster's home to be able to take in another pet.

- Share these resources with your foster parents for tips on marketing their foster pets:
 - Maddie's Fund®'s [The Foster Caregiver Marketing Guide](#)
 - Best Friends Animal Society's [10 Creative Ways to Promote a Foster Pet](#)
- If possible, add a page to your website that fosters can access with tips for marketing their foster pets. Here are some great examples:
 - Muddy Paws Rescue: [How to Market Your New Foster Dog for Adoption](#)
 - El Paso Animal Services: [Foster Resources](#)
 - One Tail at a Time: [Help Get Your Foster Adopted](#) (available on their [Foster Resources page](#))
- Another way to continue supporting your foster parents is by promoting pets in foster to your rescue and/or transport partners. It's a win-win-win, because
 - Foster pets often have a lot of information about them and have been out of the shelter longer (which your transfer partners like)
 - Your fosters appreciate you not forgetting about their foster pet once they're out of the shelter
 - It enables you to "turn around" that foster parent more quickly and potentially send a new pet to their home for foster care
- **Host Adoption Events:** Holding regular adoption events can help to increase adoptions and reduce shelter overcrowding. When hosting an adoption event, be sure to also include and invite pets residing in foster homes to attend. For tips on how to plan a successful adoption event, check out [Best Friends Animal Society's resource on How to Conduct Successful Adoption Events](#).
- **Leverage The Power of Social Media:** Social media is a great tool to market the pets that are available for adoption, to share information about Open Adoptions and your transfer program and to engage your community.
 - What works on social media is always changing. Check out recent recommendations for the channels most typically used in animal welfare:
 - [Facebook Content Strategy 2025](#)
 - [12 Instagram Trends to Watch in 2025](#)
 - [TikTok Content Strategy Guide 2025](#)
 - Aim for upbeat happy content in your marketing. Find fun ways to market even your more "challenging" pets. The community will be more likely to follow your page and interact with your posts and organization if they see positive posts showing them how they are making a difference. Check out [Don't worry, be happy: Opting for the upbeat in your messaging](#).
 - Don't forget to ask your staff, fosters, volunteers to reshare your content to increase the reach of your message.

- **Collaborate with Community Partners and Businesses:** Some of your best resources can come from working with your neighbors. Connect with community leaders, influencers, residents, and businesses around you. Visit businesses in your area and ask them how you might be able to run a collaborative promotion. Is there a local coffee shop where you can host an adoption event? Is there a local neighborhood restaurant that will put up signs about your event? Or a high school that has kids that need volunteer hours where you can find volunteers to help you post door hangers around the local neighborhoods?
- **Engage Your Local Media:** Local media love a feel-good story from their community. You can find numerous resources on working with media [in the “Basic PR Strategies” section at the bottom of this page](#). [Check out this page for tips on how to be a great interview!](#)
 - You can promote adoption events and adoption or transfer goals to your local media to help you spread the word and get your pets into good homes or attract foster families.
 - If you have or are starting a transport program, consider inviting a media partner to a transport load-in (once you and your team have the process down pat) for a feel-good story. This can be communicated via email in a media alert (also called advisory). [Check out this sample media alert/advisory template.](#)

Gain Support for Transfer and Transport Programming

Get your community excited about your transfer and transport program. Prepare messaging that shares why, how, and when you're doing this.

To get internal and external support as a receiving shelter/rescue:

- Share what shelter(s) you're partnering with, as well as your goal for partnering with them (make it as specific as possible, i.e. working to save XX dogs to make the community no-kill)
- Recruit foster parents for these transfers with that same messaging
- Publicly announce each time you transfer pets from your partner shelter with a social media post, email newsletter story, press release, etc.
 - Consider an idea like Transfer Tuesday to introduce all the pets you transferred in over the past week, or do a live video when the new transfers are being brought in.
 - Keep your supporters in the loop and informed of how often and how many pets you're transferring in. Make them feel included with insider info such as how you choose the pets you choose, and provide updates when possible, when those pets go to foster or adoptive homes.
 - Give your community opportunities to help with your transfer efforts through fostering, adopting, or supporting transfer/transport financially or through wish list items.

- Create donation opportunities for supporters who want to help but can't adopt or foster. Be sure you follow up with those donors later to update them on the progress of the pet(s) you shared stories about and about the progress of the program.

To get internal and external support as a source shelter:

- Share that you have a goal of increasing transfers out and if you're partnering with any specific organizations with the goal of working together to make your community no-kill
- Recruit foster parents for these transfers with that same messaging, like [this post from Angel City Pit Bulls](#)
- Publicly announce each time you partner with another organization to transfer pets out with a social media post, email newsletter story, press release, etc. [This post from A Friend of Jack](#) is a compelling example.
- Once a pet is accepted into your receiving partner's program, move them quickly out to a foster home if possible and ensure their website profile no longer says "available". If not possible, ensure their kennel signage does not say "available" i.e. print out a new kennel card that says "unavailable".
- Create donation opportunities for supporters who want to help but can't adopt or foster by posting wish list links for items like transport crates or items needed for foster homes. Be sure to thank your donors!

Compassionate Communication Practices to Support Your Efforts

As a leader in your community, how you communicate helps set the tone for how other people talk about animal-related topics. When you speak about humans or organizations in your communications, do so with compassion and empathy.

Language/concepts to avoid:

- **Portraying the community as irresponsible:** [Learn why](#)
- **Kill shelter/High-kill shelter:** [Learn why](#)
- **The Villain/Hero:** Every story doesn't need a villain. Avoid casting blame on individual people, animals, or organizations (for example, the shelter that's not yet no-kill, or the pet parent that surrendered their pet or didn't reclaim). This type of content is damaging to your relationship with your community and with your partners.
 - There are occasions where it is appropriate to cast a system or issue as the "villain," such as the lack of pet-inclusive housing, illness, etc.
 - Instead of always casting your organization as the hero, consider casting your volunteers, fosters, adopters, or donors as the hero. Avoid putting your organization "above" your partner organizations in your narrative.

- Will your partner be proud to share your post(s) about them and let their community know about your partnership? A good rule of thumb is to talk about them like they're in the room.