



Training Playbook: Alternative Outcomes

Introduction

While the number of animals dying in shelters today has dramatically decreased in recent decades, shelters and communities are continuously striving to implement innovative lifesaving programs to expand their capacity to care for and save pets.

Shelters and animal organizations around the country are exploring new ways to save more lives every day by collaborating with each other and engaging their communities to create strategic partnerships and programs. These innovative programs create positive outcomes for more animals.

Program Overview

The purpose of this playbook is to help agencies identify positive outcomes for at-risk animals who are not candidates for traditional live shelter outcome through reclaim, transfer or adoption.

Specific alternative programs for cats include:

- **Community cat programs**
 - Trap-neuter-return (TNR), sometimes called trap-neuter-vaccinate-return (TNVR)
 - Shelter-neuter-return (SNR) or return-to-field (RTF)
- **Working cat programs**
 - Barn, warehouse, office, shop cats
 - Service and emotional support animals
- **Foster programs**
 - Medical and temporary
 - Fospice (hospice foster)
 - Foster-to-adopt

The traditional way to manage populations of outdoor community cats (impoundment and death by lethal injection) has proven to be ineffective at curtailing their numbers in the community. This method also damages relationships with the community members who care for these cats. Nationwide, year after year, we see shelters inundated with community cats, so we know that what we have been doing isn't working.

Community cat programs (CCPs) are a critical lifesaving option. Many community cats aren't socialized to humans and therefore are unlikely to be adopted. The national reclaim rate for cats is under 3% and lost pet cats are more likely to find their way home through a community cat program. CCPs are effective at reducing the numbers of these cats, reducing shelter admissions and therefore deaths of cats in shelters, saving taxpayers money and providing a public health benefit to the community.

In CCPs, outdoor cats deemed healthy enough to qualify for the program are sterilized, vaccinated and returned to their original location. Working cat programs can provide positive outcomes for cats who do not qualify for shelter-neuter-return, such as cats who entered the shelter as kittens but were not properly socialized or community cats who were impounded without a found address.

Dogs are generally not candidates for alternative outcome programs such as return-to-field (depending on local ordinance), but there are alternative placement options for dogs, including:

- **Working dog programs**
 - Farm, warehouse, office, shop dogs
 - Service and emotional support animals

- **Foster programs**
 - Medical and temporary
 - Prison foster programs
 - Fospice (hospice foster)
 - Foster-to-adopt
 - Retirement and assisted-living communities

- **Training programs**
 - Military
 - Law enforcement
 - Prison

The most vulnerable pets (e.g., very young kittens and puppies, medical cases, senior pets) should spend as little time as possible in the shelter environment. Organizations should strive to use foster homes as much as possible. For example, animals presented as strays who may have a compromised immune system (such as the very young, ill or elderly) may be placed into temporary foster care during the mandatory hold period, and

can be evaluated for long-term foster care (medical, fospice, etc.) once that stray hold is up.

Program Composition

The following describes workforce needs, internal and/or external resources, and any other additional steps that should be taken into consideration for successful program implementation. Necessary components include:

- Local ordinances that support or, at the very least, do not work against new programs (pilot programs are an exception)
- Team lead or point person for each program (and contact information being readily available)
- Trained staff and/or volunteers
- Standard operating procedures, liability waivers, program outlines and expectations
- Necessary program supplies (food, treats, towels, sheets, medical supplies, traps, cat deterrents, leashes, collars, paperwork, etc.)
- Community engagement strategies (to let community members know about the new programs, get their buy-in and encourage them to engage)
- Printed resources (in multiple languages when possible)

It's also important to have full transparency in the community, which involves the following:

- Let the public know where your agency is in terms of lifesaving, which allows your community to help you reach your goals. Community members cannot help if they are unaware of the problems and barriers that your agency faces daily.
- Engage with your community to instill trust and confidence in your agency's lifesaving efforts. Silence opens the door for misinformation to be spread (and believed). Let the community know what you are doing, why you are doing it, and what you need from them.
- Collect accurate data and have that data readily available so you can inform the community of the proven successes of your alternative outcome programs.

- Listen to members of the community. Acknowledge their concerns and address the issues with compassion and supporting program-specific data.

[Read more about the benefits of full transparency.](#)

Sample Procedure and Program Information Documents

Now that you have a general understanding of alternative outcomes, the following documents may act as templates as you implement or scale up these programs at your organization. Keep in mind that there is no exact or perfect form of implementation. Using the considerations and program composition notes above, you should use the following only as guidelines or building blocks when creating your own standard operating procedures or documents (both internal and public). If you need further assistance or clarification, please reach out to your [regional strategist, regional director,](#) or the Best Friends national shelter support team at team2025@bestfriends.org.

Community cats:

- Best Friends Animal Society [Community Cat Programs Handbook](#).
- Best Friends Animal Society [Humane Animal Control Manual](#)
- The Humane Society of the United States [Pets for Life Guidebook](#)
- Alley Cat Allies Guide to [Colony Care](#)
- Neighborhood Cats [Overview of a TNR Project](#)
- Neighborhood Cats TNR Handbook and comprehensive [list of resources](#) for download

Prison foster and training programs:

- Idaho Humane Society [IDAPI and WISKR programs](#)
- Fulton County [Canine Cellmates](#)
- Humane Society of Southern Wisconsin [Canine Correction Academy](#)
- Washington Correction Center for Women [Prison Pet Partnership](#)

Working cat, barn cat programs (both urban and rural):

- Maddie's Fund [How to Create a Successful Barn Cat Program](#) presentation
- Humane Rescue Alliance [Blue Collar Cat Program](#)
- Austin Pets Alive! [Barn Cat Program](#)
- Tree House Humane Society [Community Cats and Cats at Work Program](#)
- Dakin Humane Society [Barn Cats/Working Cats Program](#)
- Best Friends in Los Angeles [Working Cat Program](#)

Working animals, service and emotional support animal training programs:

- Shelter to Soldier [training program](#)

- Merlin's Kids [Shelter Dog Training Programs](#)
- [Pets for Patriots](#)

Foster programs:

- Lynchburg Humane Society [Foster Parent Program](#)
- Pima Animal Care Center [Foster Program](#)
- Maddie's Fund foster [programs resources](#)
- Front Street Shelter [Foster Care Program](#)
- Pet Project Rescue [Lukas Project](#) (hospice)