

Best Friends supports return-to-home programs



Reuniting lost pets with their people is one of the most critical roles for shelters across the country. A solid **return-to-owner** (aka return-to-home) program encompasses everyone on the shelter's team, including animal control officers returning pets in the field (instead of bringing them to a shelter), intake staff scanning stray pets for microchips, volunteers managing lost-and-found social media pages and support given by platforms like **Petco's Love Lost**.



Best Friends Animal Society endorses collaborative and robust return-to-home programs. To Best Friends, a successful return-to-home program includes components like these:



- Allows the public to view and place an adoption hold on an animal before the animal's stray hold period expires
- Includes a foster-finder program to help keep pets in the neighborhoods where they were found
- Equips officers to support return-to-home in the field
- Leverages utility companies to help with dead-end microchips
- Promotes communication first when a free-of-restraint pet is found (when a loose pet is found, seeing if the surroundings give any clues as to where the owner is located, then talking to neighbors and leaving ample signage if no owner is found)
- Waives return-to-home fees and citations when those are barriers to reunification
- Hosts low-cost or free microchip clinics in the community, while offering microchips to the public at the shelter
- Includes microchips as a central component of the licensure program
- Allows owners to look for lost pets at the shelter anytime staff are on-site, even outside of normal business hours



RESOURCES

Return-to-Owner Playbook: This playbook provides an overview of return-to-owner (RTO) programs and help you implement an aggressive RTO program at your agency. By making every effort to identify and notify pet owners and make the process of reunification easy, agencies can ensure that their limited resources are spent where they are needed most.

Field Return-to-Owner Playbook: Recently, there has been a shift toward field officers playing a role in the overall lifesaving team by working to reduce intake through various programs. This playbook provides an overview of field return-to-owner (F-RTO) programs and help you implement an aggressive F-RTO program at your animal control agency.

A Call-Takers Guide to Fielding Loose Animal Calls During COVID-19: During the pandemic, shelters and field service departments have cut back, even eliminated, their responses to loose animal calls. This is a necessary step and will support lifesaving efforts; however, it can mean challenging conversations with members of the public when they call to make a report. Call-takers should see this as an opportunity to provide helpful information to the public and work to resolve issues by using the resources that already exist within the community.