



Training Playbook:

Training New Animal Care Staff

Introduction

Most of the time in animal welfare we are so busy trying to get through daily operations and animal needs we forget to slow down and smell the... Well, maybe there are things we don't want to slow down and smell in a shelter, but we do often forget to slow down and focus on staff needs. When onboarding new staff, slowing down and taking the time to train and engage them can have an everlasting effect and is the critical first step to retaining shelter employees.

Providing staff with the resources and trainings they need not only helps increase efficiency in daily operations, it also supports growth in the organization and the industry. Studies have shown when new staff feel the importance and impact of their job, it builds confidence, leads to increased retention and provides staff with a meaningful connection to the organization and the mission.

Training schedule

Define the learning opportunity and set expectations

- **Define the training period.** Map out the training agenda and key learning elements and sign off on skill requirements as new staff members increase their knowledge of your organization and practices. Initially, you want staff to become aware of daily operations and how to increase their skill sets regarding those daily needs. Don't forget to add organizational programming aspects as well as opportunities to cross-train in other departments.
- **Utilize mentors and shadowing.** Pair each new employee with a mentor to help them navigate your organization. Not only does this create a team environment, but it also helps mentees identify organizational objectives, gain specific skills and increase their overall job satisfaction. Questions that arise during the training also can be responded to in a quick and effective manner by the mentor.
- **Implement training sign-off sheets.** Measure a starting point and chart the training and skills learned. Every time an employee learns a new skill, have both that employee and their training supervisor sign off with the date. This type of performance evaluation ensures that goals and work standards are being met. This process can also identify areas that may need more time or resources to help the new staff member become proficient. Check out the BFAS Animal Care Staff Training Manual for a sample training sign-off sheet and more!

- **Follow up.** Studies have shown that the experiences of employees during their first 30, 60 and 90 days have a big impact on their life cycle with the organization and their overall engagement with and attitude about the organization. Ensure that staff feel they are allowed to make mistakes during their training process and have a safe space to share their opinions. Set aside meeting times for each of these intervals and have new staff share feedback about their onboarding experiences with you and other leadership.

Job aides

Training should come with learning resources.

- **Animal care staff training manual.** This BFAS manual is a compilation of animal care and management knowledge from recognized animal welfare experts, including veterinarians, behaviorists and researchers. This varied expertise can be used to enhance animal care and welfare, which includes the physical, psychological and emotional health of shelter pets. Incorporating the information from this manual into animal management practices in shelters maximizes excellence in animal care and welfare, builds positive community engagement and ensures institutions are maintaining proven practices.
 - [Animal Care Staff Training Manual](#) (*Download and Customize*)
- **SOPs.** [Standard operating procedure](#) (SOP) documents provide clear-cut directions and instructions about organizational processes. Making SOPs easily accessible to all team members (e.g., posted around the shelter, on shared drives, printed copies in binders) creates consistency throughout the organization regarding daily operations. The development and implementation of SOPs helps ensure consistent work and care for the animals as well as how people are treated within your agency.
- **Visual aids.** Provide visual learning aids in all shelter areas. Laminate SOPs, helpful reminders, and quick “how to” lists and post them in relevant areas throughout the shelter. Such visual reminders will help staff remember procedural processes.
- **Quizzes.** Create simple (and fun!) quizzes and build them into training sequences. These tests can be given verbally or online. This type of learning check-in is helpful in measuring skills and identifying knowledge gaps.

Additional resources

Not everyone learns in the same manner, so have a variety of training materials in different formats.

- **Webinars/e-learning.** Digital trainings are one of the most efficient ways to educate staff and keep them up to date on the ever-changing trends in animal welfare. The digital format allows you to combine interactive games, quizzes activities, and gamification to keep employees engaged and to improve knowledge retention.
- **Role playing.** Role playing is when a staff member and a trainer act out roles in potential workplace scenarios. This method is most effective for employees whose jobs include direct client or customer interaction, as it gives them some experience handling difficult situations. Creating scripts for various scenarios and utilizing them as reference guides provides staff with a supportive resource they can use throughout their training process.
- **Video training -** Video training is another efficient and effective method for delivering pertinent job information. [Creating training videos](#) gives employees information in an easy-to-understand format that they can watch again at any time. Investing in video training is a one-time cost that can be used until your processes need to be updated.

Sample procedure and program information documents

Use the following documents as guidelines or building blocks when creating your own SOPs or training 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

- [Animal Care Staff Training Manual \(Downloadable and Fillable\)](#)
- [Training Playbook: Staff Development and Training](#)
- [Staff Recruitment and Retention Playbook](#)
- [A Road Map to New Hire Orientation](#)
- [ASPCAPro Training](#)
- [More tips on getting your shelter's SOPs in shape](#)
- [Texas Animal Control Association's Manual of Standard Operating Procedures](#)
- [BFAS E-Learning Resources](#)