

Animal Shelter Ad-Hoc Committee Best Practices Guide

Executive Summary

We would like to strongly emphasize that this transformational approach is based on currently recognized methods of providing the most humane care for shelter animals as well as the best support and assistance programs for all members of the community. It needs to be built into the shelter management, policies, training and operations from the ground up and would be difficult to overlay on an existing structure with values and priorities that are very different from this approach.

1. Vision and Mission – The Vision is for Los Alamos County is to become a socially conscious animal community that ensures that every homeless pet has a safe place in which to be cared for, physically and emotionally, until they find their forever home. The Animal Shelter should support this vision by ensuring that
 - a. the facility is clean, well-maintained and provides a safe and healthful environment for our animals, staff, volunteers and the public.
 - b. the best shelter enrichment practices are provided by well-trained and compassionate staff and volunteers
 - c. best practice adoption, foster, transfer, surrender prevention programs, and a vigorous volunteer program are implemented

Further, the mission supports the broader goals of laws defending animals against cruelty and neglect, a local ordinance that supports animal welfare, and includes education and outreach to ensure a safe community for pets, pet owners, and non-pet owners.

2. Shelter Animal Care Policies and Procedures – Policies and Procedures are built around the best practices for animal welfare and daily enrichment. These policies follow the Association for Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines for intake, behavior evaluation, daily routines, enrichment, socialization, and behavior modification. In addition, the shelter should adopt a euthanasia policy and procedure that balances the life and well being of animals while protecting public safety and also protects the emotional well-being of euthanasia decision makers. A policy for legal holds must also be adopted that these animals receive humane care the same as other shelter animals including daily enrichment and social contact.
3. Training and Enrichment – All aspects of the shelter environment utilize the most effective techniques to minimize shelter stress and to provide daily enrichment. Stress reduction increases the chances that shelter animals are suitable for adoption as safe and friendly family pets. In order to produce an optimal shelter environment, managers and staff members who provide behavior assessments and training and behavior

modification programs are certified through nationally recognized programs. In addition, all appropriate staff complete training that focuses on assessments, training, play groups, designing and monitoring enrichment activities, and providing adoption guidance. Staff and volunteers receive annual training updates to maintain knowledge of current best practices. The main purpose of this training is to ensure that staff fully understand the stressors, the effects they have on animals residing at a shelter, and up to date ways to combat it.

4. **Inspections and Metrics** – It is essential that a humane and properly operated shelter be subject to proper oversight and that it engages in a continuous planning process to improve facilities, policies and procedures, training, and operations. In order to do this, metrics are needed to quantify established goals, which are designed to make certain that the shelter fulfills its mission for the community.
This planning and oversight function includes a permanent advisory board that is briefed regularly and provides input on appropriateness of metrics and plans for improvements. It is also reviewed regularly by County managers as well as by external animal shelter and animal protection experts. Public input on shelter operations is also solicited on a regular basis. Reviews should address facility issues, financial issues, staffing issues, and policies and procedures, as well as adoption success rates and public safety concerns. Metrics should assess both outcomes of animals (adoption, transfer, euthanasia), length of stay, and in-shelter requirements including enrichment, health care, and disease prevention.
5. **Ordinance** – A well-crafted pet ordinance helps communities provide the very best outcomes for shelter animals, and pet ownership experience. In addition, it provides structure so that the community can be pet friendly while also supporting the needs of non pet owners. This ordinance can help the community become a socially humane community by outlawing inhumane practices such as tethering that can lead to animal injury and behavior issues. A cost-of-care provision can help prevent pet neglect and cruelty and can help recover costs when these cases do occur. By having larger fees for unneutered animals the ordinance can also help to increase spay/neuters rates, and provide information on spay neuter, vaccination, and return to owner rates.
6. **Outreach** – An excellent animal shelter takes a leadership role in matters related to pet ownership and includes partnerships with local organizations, businesses and nearby rescue operations. Important components include developing creative programs to effectively market adoptable pets, education programs for responsible pet ownership and information about the benefits of spay/neutering. Adoption counseling and follow-up programs provide information about how to find local obedience classes and behavioral training, veterinary care and pet supplies. The shelter can also educate landlords and businesses about how to be pet-friendly while maintaining a safe and sanitary environment. Last, but not least, one of the most valuable services a shelter provides is a surrender prevention program which helps keep pets and owners together

by providing financial assistance, behavioral training, or tips on common issues such as how reduce barking or improve fencing.

7. Other Programs – A humane shelter that successfully meets the highest animal welfare goals has programs to meet animals' needs while in the shelter and to assist them in finding a permanent caring home. These include the following:
 - a. Volunteer Program – A robust volunteer program headed by a qualified volunteer coordinator that enlists enthusiastic, well-trained volunteers who improve the lives of the animals residing at the shelter and who receive a rewarding and educational experience in return.
 - b. Foster Program – A comprehensive network of knowledgeable foster parents who can provide proper care for pregnant mothers, newborns and very young puppies and kittens. Foster homes also provide home care for animals in need of more involved behavioral, medical, hospice, or other special needs.
 - c. Transfer Program – A well-designed transfer program is one of the most critical and innovative programs at humane shelters—it is literally a lifesaver. Sometimes shelters get overwhelmed with certain breeds or ages of dogs and cats for whom there is not a strong demand, which leaves those animals at risk of being euthanized. Meanwhile, other shelters and rescue groups may have demand for these animals in their communities. A well-organized reciprocal transfer agreement can benefit both shelters by transferring healthy, socialized animals, to the community where these animals may find a wider audience and their forever homes.