

model is not realistic for recouping operating costs and instead increases a municipality's daily costs for animal care, and leads to animal shelters being at capacity and the death of pets to create space for incoming animals.

If people cannot afford the fees associated with reclaiming their pets, they leave the animal shelter upset, will tell their neighbors and friends, will not adopt from the animal shelter, and won't volunteer or donate. This punitive model creates enemies and adversaries rather than ambassadors and allies for animal services in a community. Punitive measures do not build community trust and collaborative relationships, and fees do not necessarily teach people a lesson.

Many progressive animal services organizations have given animal services leadership the ability and authority to waive fees for adoptions, reclamations and other services when doing so will result in avoiding ending pets' lives prematurely (e.g., when the shelter is at capacity) and will ultimately save the jurisdiction money on animal care and operating costs.

There are hidden costs associated with killing pets as well as missed economic benefits of a pet-valuing and lifesaving animal services department and community. Regarding hidden costs, for example, absenteeism, behavior and performance problems, and staff turnover tend to be higher in environments where staff are expected to prematurely end the lives of savable pets. One missed economic benefit is that the public avoids visiting shelters where lifesaving is not a priority.

## Partnerships

Partnerships with nonprofit animal welfare organizations, other government agencies related to wellness, and the business community are vital for finding lifesaving solutions because municipal animal services departments frequently do not have the resources to meet all of the community's needs. Solid partnerships with nonprofits can assist animal shelters with finding resources for emergency surgeries, medical intervention and treatment programs, foster home networks, and behavior assistance, training and funding. For more on this topic, see [Chapter 5](#), "Coalition-Building."

## Data reporting and transparency

Reporting all data related to animal services is crucial for building trust between animal services and the community, animal welfare nonprofits, activists and advocates. Being fully transparent communicates the needs of animal services and invites the community to volunteer, foster, adopt, donate and, in general, become ambassadors for animal services.

Some animal services departments are reluctant to make their data available, but being transparent about statistics can be an effective way to get help and support from the community. In addition, it allows organizations subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

requirements to control their messaging, rather than letting others drive the conversation through their FOIA request.

It is recommended that shelters report their data on Shelter Animals Count ([shelteranimalscount.org](http://shelteranimalscount.org)), a national database of sheltered animal statistics. For more information, see [Appendix O](#), “Shelter Animal Data Collection.”

## Communication and social media

An easy-to-use, mobile-friendly website and an active social media presence are vital tools for an animal services department’s success. These critical communication tools will work in tandem to keep your community up to date regarding hours, adoption promotions, animal services’ needs, emergencies and, most important, opportunities for the community to assist in your work.

These days, there is a very real expectation from the public that your department is using social media to communicate. A large portion of the U.S. population, after all, are daily users on at least one social media platform. Here are four reasons why your department should maintain an active social media presence:

1. It’s the fastest and cheapest communication tool. It only takes a few minutes to publish something on a social media site, and the response is nearly instantaneous. The real-time nature of social media makes it ideal for updating your community quickly about new animals available for adoption, recent adoptions, special events or emergencies that require community support.
2. It builds a relationship with your audience, so they can unite around your cause. As long as your community knows you on social media, it doesn’t matter if your brick-and-mortar location exists off the beaten path. You can build a strong relationship with your followers by posting quality content that’s easy to understand, is visually interesting to consume, and furthers your mission. Social media provides a platform for educating the public about your cause, and also for listening to their comments and questions.
3. It drives targeted traffic to your website, your primary communication tool. You might have the most beautiful, easy-to-use website, but without social media to point people there, few people would see it.
4. It’s key to providing good customer service. Your department may not be selling anything, but you rely on the community to help you find families for homeless animals. Everyone is a potential adopter and the quicker you can answer their questions to get an animal out the door, the sooner you can help another animal. Of course, it’s not enough to simply post content on your social media page and walk away. Your followers want to engage with you and they expect their questions to be answered in a timely manner.