



Training Playbook: **Alternative** **Outcomes**

Introduction

While the number of animals dying in shelters today has dramatically decreased in the past 35 years (from 17 million per year to less than one million), shelters and communities are continuously striving to implement innovative lifesaving programs to expand their capacity to care for and save homeless pets. This quest to save lives remains a daily ongoing challenge.

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 that are critical to achieving and maintaining no-kill status. These innovative programs create live outcomes for animals that are alternatives to traditional adoption and transfer programs and have become standard best practice for shelters. This playbook will provide examples of successful alternative outcome programs.

Program Overview

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

Specific programs for cats include:

- Working cat programs
 - Barn, warehouse, office, shop cats
 - Service and emotional support animals
- Community cat programs
 - TNR (trap-neuter-return)
 - TNVR (trap-neuter-vaccinate-return)
 - SNR (shelter-neuter-return)
 - RTF (return-to-field)

Across the nation, the highest demographic of animals dying in shelters is cats who simply have no possible live-outcome pathway (an estimated 30% of all cats who enter shelters). The national reclaim average for cats in shelters is less than 2.5%, and about

50% of cats who end up in shelters are community (aka unowned, stray, feral) cats.

The traditional way to manage populations of community cats (impoundment and death by lethal injection) has proven to be ineffective at curtailing their numbers. 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. CCPs are effective at reducing the numbers of these cats, reducing shelter admissions and therefore shelter deaths, saving taxpayers money and providing a public health benefit to the community. In such programs, unowned, free-roaming cats deemed healthy enough to qualify for the program are sterilized, vaccinated and returned to their original location.

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

- 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, seniors) 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 with your department)
- Printed resources

It's also important to have full transparency in the community. This involves the following:

- Letting the public know where your department is in terms of lifesaving allows your community to help you get where you need to be. Community members cannot help if they are unaware of the problems and barriers that your department faces daily.
- Being engaged with your community will lead to trust and confidence in your 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.
- Keep 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 specialist, regional director, or the Best Friends shelter outreach team at team2025@bestfriends.org.

Community cats:

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

Prison foster and training programs:

- Idaho Humane Society's [IDAPI and WISKR programs](#)
- Marion County's [FIDO Project \(Florida Inmates and Dog Obedience\)](#)
- Pit Sisters' [TAILS program](#)
- Alachua County Animal Services' [Paws on Parole: Prison-Based Dog Training Programs](#)
- Humane Society of Southern Wisconsin's [Canine Correction Academy](#)
- Washington Correction Center for Women's [Prison Pet Partnership](#)

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

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

- Dakin Humane Society's Barn Cats/Working Cats Program
- SpokAnimal's Farm Livin' Barn Cat Program
- Best Friends in Los Angeles Working Cat Program

Working animals, service and emotional support animal training programs:

- Sherry Woodard's Canines with Careers program (Best Friends Animal Society)
- Shelter to Soldier's training program
- Anderson Animal Shelter's Military Veterans Program
- American Humane's Lois Pope Life Center for Military Affairs
- Merlin's Kids' Shelter Dog Training Programs

Foster programs:

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