

Florida Animal Control Association & The Florida Association of Animal Welfare Organizations



Best Practices for Humane Care & High Live Release Programming



Florida Animal
Control Association



FAAWO
FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF ANIMAL WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS

About FACA and FAAWO

The Florida Animal Control Association (FACA) and Florida Association of Animal Welfare Organizations (FAAWO) recognize that every shelter, animal control agency, and rescue group, collectively referred to as "organizations," has a responsibility to provide quality and humane care to every animal received and to be diligent in its efforts to find appropriate live outcomes for as many animals as possible.

FACA and FAAWO also acknowledge and take seriously their responsibility for public safety and promoting safe interactions between the community and its pets. We believe this is paramount to a successful program.

FACA and FAAWO recognize that every organization is different in terms of local animal ordinances, available resources including funding, and community needs. We understand that not every organization will be able to immediately follow the recommendations provided, but it is our hope that those responsible for the operation of Florida's animal organizations will start the process, develop a plan, and establish timeframes for needed improvements.

This document is not intended to be comprehensive but rather to serve as a basis from which shelters and rescue organizations can work to develop and implement minimum best practices for care while increasing the number of animal lives saved. FACA and FAAWO believe this can be accomplished without compromising public safety.



Best Practices for Humane Care

The public at-large expects that animals taken in by an organization will be properly cared for and treated humanely.

FACA and FAAWO believe that at a minimum, all organizations should meet the five freedoms:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst; by making provisions for readily accessible wholesome food and fresh water.
2. Freedom from discomfort; by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. Freedom from Pain, Injury, or Disease; by implementing proper sanitation and vaccination practices in addition to providing quick examination and treatment of sick or injured pets.
4. Freedom to express normal behavior; by providing adequate space with separate areas for resting, eating, and eliminating, daily enrichment including physical activity and mental stimulation, and positive, predictable, and regular social interactions with people and/or other animals as appropriate for the individual.
5. Freedom from Fear and Distress; by providing proper segregation of species, keeping intact males from females, minimizing unnecessary noise and providing a stress-free environment as much as is possible.

Training:

Staff that have direct contact and care responsibilities associated with the animals should have at a minimum, the following training:

1. Disease recognition;
2. Shelter sanitation;
3. Animal Behavior;
4. Safe and humane animal handling;
5. Proper use of equipment;

6. Pet first aid;
7. Disaster planning and response.

Records should be kept regarding training that staff has received, to include name of staff, class title, date of instruction, instructor, and organization providing the training and Continuing Education (CE) credits received.



Capacity for Care:

Every organization has a "capacity for care (CC)." The CC will vary widely depending on housing, staffing, the types of animals received, and other resources. Organizations should not operate beyond their capacity for care by being forced or required to accept animals any time for any reason in any number. It is typical that during summer months, organizations in Florida are pushed far beyond their limits in terms of the number of animals that can be properly cared for. For this reason, FACA and FAAWO believe that organizations should determine what programs may help them operate within their capacity for care.

Length of Stay:

Organizations should in general work with a "quick-in, quick-out" philosophy. It is in the best interest of the animal to not be housed at a shelter or otherwise confined any longer than absolutely necessary. Prolonged housing periods add to stress, disease and euthanasia. FACA and FAAWO recommend a close examination of the length of stay for dogs, cats, puppies, and kittens to determine what animals move most quickly out of the shelter and to identify bottlenecks in the animal flow through the shelter. All efforts need to be made to minimize the length of stay for animals with an emphasis on a live release outcome.

Best Practices for High Live Release Programming

Best practices for high live release programming are achieved through implementation of comprehensive adoption programs to include flexible adoption fees (including fee waived), an easy and user-friendly adoption process, offsite adoption venues, participation in community events with animals for adoption, and collaboration with area public and private partners. The objective is to re-home or divert as many pets as possible, regardless of age, to approved organizations or foster homes.



Shelter Health and Intake Management:

All organizations should have an established protocol for the animal intake process that includes an examination and administration of core vaccines in addition to anthelmintics and flea/tick control agents as necessary. Organizations should have access to a veterinarian either through employment, contract, or consultation to prevent animal pain and suffering and to allow treatment of common illnesses and injuries. A veterinarian should prescribe and oversee all medical treatments.

Additionally, it is important that all animals be closely and properly monitored to ensure early detection of illness or injury or behavioral change. Measures need to be in place to address problems as soon as possible.

Reference:

Animal Shelter Veterinarian Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters

<http://www.sheltervet.org/assets/docs/shelter-standards-oct2011-wforward.pdf>

Adoption program:

Organizations should have the flexibility to change adoption fees including the ability to offer fee waived adoptions when the need arises and to facilitate more adoptions. This is particularly important during times of high intake, summer months, when these organizations are engaging in special adoption events, or to promote harder to place animals, including animals that have been sheltered for extended periods of time.

Open Adoptions:

Animals are best served by an open adoption process. Conversations with potential adopters go a long way towards understanding the potential adoptive home.

A basic application that is easy to complete and a friendly conversation to help the adopter choose a pet that will be a good fit typically results in a better outcome. Long and strict adoption applications/requirements should be avoided because they have a tendency to discourage even the most well intentioned adopter.

Organizations should also host adoption events to include special activities and other enticements to attract potential adopters. Many organizations offer theme- based events that can be fun for the entire family. This also helps with the public's perception of the organization. Consider including other entities in your area to better serve the community and demonstrate that you support each other and want to offer as many animals as possible for adoption.

Staff should be available to assist adopters so that an informed decision can be made about what pet to adopt taking into





account, for example, family and home environment, if other pets are in the household, etc. Also, information on how to introduce pets into a new home is critical in preventing pets from being returned after adoption.

Organizations should remain breed neutral and evaluate and place dogs for adoption based on the individual rather than any preconceptions regarding specific breed characteristics.

Offsite Events and Outreach

Offsite events will increase exposure for pets to potential adopters who may not visit an animal organization. These offsite venues make adoptable pets available to a wider range of people looking to acquire a new pet. Organizations should work with area public and private entities to form partnerships that will help facilitate offsite adoptions. This can reduce the workload for the organization by enlisting outside assistance and participation. Agreements between the parties involved may be necessary so that roles can be clearly defined.

In addition to offering offsite adoptions, community outreach should be part of the effort to save more lives. Messaging should be focused on saving lives without compromising public safety. Organizations should try to budget for marketing and advertising as part of their annual budget process to help ensure adequate exposure for adoptable pets, services and programs.

Social media is critical to communicating with the citizens in your community. It is recommended that every organization have a website, either a stand-alone website or one that is linked to a main city/county site. This offers an excellent forum for distributing information

about programs, services, and adoptable pets to the community. Facebook, Instagram, Constant Contact and other social media outlets bolster adoptions.

All organizations are encouraged to engage in appropriate social media activities.

Foster/volunteer programs:

Foster care programs may be used to provide care for pets entering the shelter that may not be suitable candidates for immediate adoption. A successful foster program plays a vital role in increasing the availability of healthy, sociable, and adoptable pets while also alleviating constraints for space. Foster-to-adopt programs have become more widely accepted as a method to keep animals out of the shelter system and ensure a live outcome.

It is recommended that all organizations accept and train volunteers and foster parents.

Having an active volunteer workforce is also instrumental in the life-saving effort, as volunteers can help fill gaps in care provided to the animals, assist with adoption events, provide enrichment and training to sheltered pets, and much more. A robust volunteer program can help save many lives.



Shelters, Rescue Organizations, Veterinary and Other Partnerships:

Animal shelters and animal control agencies should work to develop positive relationships with as many approved animal rescue organizations that adhere to recommended humane standards as possible. It is also recommended that an agreement be in place

between the shelter, animal control agency and the rescue organization to ensure the roles are clear and basic guidelines are followed. On a regular basis, shelters and animal control agencies should conduct site visits of rescue organizations to which animals will be sent in order to ensure animals are not being inadvertently sent into an animal hoarding situation. If a site visit is not possible, letters of recommendation from veterinarians or other professionals may be considered.

Shelters and animal control agencies should make the process of animal transfer easy for approved rescues to receive animals and should not create unnecessary obstacles to the process. A well-structured program of collaboration with approved rescue organizations can greatly increase the number of lives saved.

The same can be said about partnering with area veterinarians and other animal welfare organizations in your area. Collaborating with these individuals and entities will help the effort to save lives. Some veterinarians may be willing to discount services or work from a voucher program where owners make a co-payment and remaining costs are provided via grant funding.



There should be ongoing and open communication among the organizations, veterinarians and other stakeholders regarding programs, services, resources etc. This helps organizations avoid duplication of services and allow pooling of resources.

As part of this collaborative effort, a budget analysis should be conducted by each organization to ensure an understanding of resource limitations and future needs.

Hours of Operation:

Organizations should determine the most conducive hours for animal receiving and adoption so the best interests of the animals and the community are served and animals are not left in a situation resulting in abandonment.

Hours of operation should offer evening and weekend hours in an effort to accommodate members of the community who work. Operating Monday-Friday during the same hours many people are working is not conducive to saving lives or reuniting pets with owners.

For organizations that run out of space quickly and have to euthanize animals as a result, they need to be open at certain times for live release efforts only and not to accept incoming animals into the shelter. Reserving certain days/times during the week or weekend for live outcomes only will help free up much needed space for incoming animals and help shelters avoid unnecessary euthanasia.

Lost & Found Program:

Organizations should make every reasonable effort to get lost pets back to their owners. Any organization that receives lost or stray dogs or cats should create written policies and procedures to ensure that every reasonable effort

is made to quickly and reliably reunite pets with their owners. These policies should include:

- a.** Upon intake, screening of lost or stray dogs and cats for identification, including tags, licenses, implanted microchips, and tattoos.
- b.** A process for matching received lost or stray dogs and



cats with any reports of lost pets received by the shelter from owners.

c. Public notice of lost or stray dogs and cats received, provided at the shelter or on the Internet, as appropriate, within 48 hours of the animal's admission.

d. Reasonable efforts to notify identified owners of lost or stray dogs and cats within 48 hours of identification. Such reasonable efforts should include, but are not limited to, attempts to contact identified owners by telephone, by electronic mail, by United States mail, or by personal service at the owner's last known phone number and address.

e. Notice to the public of the shelter's location, hours, fees, and the return-to-owner process posted on the Internet, with the shelter's business hours posted outside the shelter facility and recorded on the shelter's telephone answering system message.

f. Access for owners to retrieve dogs and cats at least one weekend day per week and after 5:00 p.m. one weekday per week, provided that complying with the requirements of this sub-subparagraph need not require an increase in total operating hours.

g. Direct return-to-owner protocols that allow animal control officers in the field to directly return lost or stray dogs and cats to their owners when the owners have been identified.

h. Procedural safeguards to minimize the euthanasia of owned dogs and cats. Such safeguards shall include, but are not limited to, record verification to ensure that each animal to be euthanized is the correct animal designated for the procedure and proper scanning for an implanted microchip using a universal scanner immediately prior to the procedure.

i. Temporary extension of local minimum stray hold



periods after a disaster declared by the President or Governor, if deemed necessary by local government.

j. Offering the public easy access to pet identification methods such as microchipping, pet ID tags, etc.



Animal Control Agencies are also encouraged to offer a "Free Ride Home" from an animal control officer for pets that bear identification. This is a great way to reunite pets and owners and create good will in the community. This can be limited to pets that are not posing an immediate threat to public safety and limited to one time per year, two years, etc. Shelters should offer a mechanism for citizens to complete a lost or found report that is monitored by staff and/or volunteers. Owners must be encouraged to visit the shelter frequently since they will be the best person to identify their own pet(s).

Animal Code:

Local animal ordinances should be consistent with accepted best practices to include return to field and safety net programs, officer discretion on how to resolve complaints, provisions for home quarantine as approved by the appropriate Health Department, and the ability to flex fees. There should be emphasis on problem resolution rather than animal impoundment. Educating the community should be a focus of Animal Control Officers.

Pet retention:

The number of pets that are voluntarily relinquished to organizations every year is staggering. Regardless of the reason, pet relinquishment should be an absolute last



option. A study conducted by the ASPCA in 2015 showed that 30-40% of pet owners would keep their pets if they were given temporary assistance. Assistance may come in the form of free spay/neuter, veterinary care, payment of a pet deposit, training, boarding, provisions for food, temporary fostering, etc. Since it would be

difficult if not impossible for a shelter to offer all of these various services to owners in need, collaboration among organizations to develop a list of resources is recommended.

Public Records:

All organizations should be willing and able to share information with the public and other entities regarding the number and types of animals received and cared for, disposition of each animal, number and types of complaints responded to in the field and the outcome of those complaints if applicable. FACA and FAAWO recommend that monthly statistical information be entered into the Shelter Animals Count program. Organizations must be diligent in an effort to ensure that all data is complete and accurate.

Euthanasia:

All reasonable efforts should be made to provide for live release of sheltered animals taking into consideration capacity for care, length of stay, existing disease challenges, available resources, and facility design. When euthanasia is deemed necessary, every effort must be made to minimize fear and stress on each animal.

Summary of Programming Recommendations:

1. Offer flexible adoption fees
2. Host adoption events
3. Offer animals for adoption at offsite venues
4. Engage in community outreach
5. Use social media
6. Offer an open/easy adoption process
7. Provide assistance to adopters
8. Use volunteers/fosters including foster to adopt
9. Work with legitimate rescue organizations
10. Have user friendly hours of operation
11. Reserve certain hours for live release only
12. Offer a lost/found program that is monitored by staff/volunteers
13. Work with area organizations and individuals to offer pet retention resources
14. Collaborate to maximize resources
15. Conduct frequent budget analysis to identify resource limitations and plan for future needs.
16. Veterinary care must be offered by shelter veterinarian, contracted veterinarian or veterinary consultation.
17. Euthanasia should be the last option and provisions outlined in statute must be followed.
18. Animal shelters and rescue organizations should operate with transparency
19. Steps must be taken to minimize the length of stay and to avoid operating above capacity for care.



Contact Information:

Florida Animal Control Association
PO Box 211267
Royal Palm Beach, FL 33421
Info@FloridaAnimalControl.org
Ph. 786-505-FACA (3222)
Fax. 561-249-0422

**Florida Association of Animal
Welfare Organizations**
PO Box 220923
West Palm Beach, FL 33422

