Building Community Partnerships

Why Community Partnerships?

When animal services agencies connect with other organizations, both benefit to better support people and pets where they live. Creating relationships with human and environmental organizations offers a more holistic approach to care.

Potential partner organizations may include child welfare agencies, organizations that provide support for individuals and families experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, scouting and youth organizations, chambers of commerce, social services, public health agencies, food pantries, senior services, domestic violence support services, government agencies, non-profit organizations and organizations that promote racial and social justice and equity.

Resources to find local providers and potential partners can be found at Findhelp.org, pets.findhelp.com, and The United Way 2-1-1. Successful community partnerships allow for the expansion of programs and services and increase support for families to keep their pets. These partnerships, in turn, may decrease the number of animals that need to enter the physical animal shelter.

What problem does the HASS Approach to Community Partnerships solve?

Traditional animal shelters and animal services agencies operate in isolation, cut off from larger community conversations about human and environmental well-being. When we consider animal shelters through a One Health framework, the health of animals is connected to the health of people and the health of our environment. In other words, to address the root causes that lead to animal welfare issues, we need to connect to organizations outside of the animal world.

What are the potential benefits?

- Improve customer satisfaction
- Save money
- Build community engagement
- Grow volunteer support
- Increase marketing and media engagement
- Increase fundraising
- Keep more people and animals together

- Reduce intake
- Increase adoption and/or rescue placement
- Promote diversity, equity and inclusion
- Support human health and wellness
- Increase public safety
- Promote responsible pet ownership

- Increase the number of animals returned home

How does an organization begin?

Step 1. First, determine what you hope to accomplish through partnerships. Use the Community Partnership FUN! Brainstorming Worksheet to help.

For *example, reduce the number of pets entering the animal shelter because their owner or caregiver was evicted.*

Step 2. Make a list of local organizations that may help you to achieve this goal. Use the Outlining Community Partnerships Worksheet as a guide to determine which partnerships you have and uncover potential new partnerships. You can also find organizations on pets.findhelp.com.

Constables, eviction court, tenants' rights groups, city or county health department, low-cost, pet-accessible apartment complexes, boarding kennels, code enforcement, family services, food or housing insecure services.

Step 3. Determine which partnerships on your list might result in the best outcomes for people and pets. Make a few phone calls to find the 'right' partners and always try to find animal lovers within the agencies you're contacting. It only takes one animal lover, working in a partner organization, to make a huge impact! You can use the Potential Community Partnership Contact List to outline the potential partners' contact information and who among your team will own the partnership and initiate the call.

When you call, be sure to tell a story that speaks to your organization's mission, or ask the person on the other line if they have a pet, or how their clients or the people they work with benefit from animals in their lives.

Step 4. Once you find a viable partner, set up a meeting to talk about how you can work together. Partnerships can be VERY simple so don't be intimidated by this step. In your initial conversation, cover the following:

- Learn more about the organization, its mission, and its scope of work
- Tell the organization about you and why you want to partner. Be specific.
- Tell the organization about the goals you would want to accomplish

Example: The animal shelter formed a partnership with the constables' office (who perform evictions.) The constables used to make people leave in 1 hour but thanks to the partnership, the constables now give pet owners 48 hours to vacate and they provide tenants with a list of resources for emergency and short-term boarding options and other pet resources.

Step 5. Assign a point person (or more than one) in the organization to manage the partnership. Partnerships, like other relationships, need care and communication so make sure the partner knows how to get help when they need it and who to contact within your organization the animal to get a prompt response.

Step 6. Pilot a partnership just like you would any other new program. Ongoing communication with your partner will be critical to maintaining relationships and achieving success.

Step 7. As you pilot a partnership, have a plan, including one or more SOPs, the role and responsibilities of each party, and the amount of staff time and other resources that are necessary. Some partnerships require very little, but others are more labor-intensive and may even require a full-time volunteer or staff person, or a written MOU or agreement. For example, San Diego Humane Society created a volunteer position, Community Pantry Partner Liaison to serve as a liaison between the Community Pet Pantry and the partner locations/organizations.

Example: Pima Animal Care Center formed a partnership with three memory care (assisted living) centers. This partnership involved the residents of the facility fostering kittens. It was a fantastic partnership and led to the organization receiving several large grants and lots of national attention. However, there were challenges, too. Staff had to select and transport kittens, volunteers were needed to train the residents and memory care staff, and the hardest part was when kittens got sick or had other issues and had to come back to the shelter for care. The shelter felt the benefit was worth the challenges, but eventually, the partnership became too labor-intensive to be sustainable on a large scale. If the organization invested dedicated staff and volunteers before this point, they could have grown the partnership, but they chose to reduce the size of this program and pursue less labor-intensive partnerships instead.

Example #2: A small, rural shelter wanted to form a partnership to provide emergency boarding to pet owners who needed to be hospitalized and had no one to care for their pets. They partnered with a local boarding facility and provided vouchers for up to 30 days of boarding for qualifying individuals. They wrote an MOU with the boarding facility and both parties agreed on the terms. They printed numbered vouchers and the staff could give them out to people who met the criteria. The manager ensured only a certain number of vouchers were used each month. This was easy for the shelter and resulted in 120 animals being boarded (in lieu of shelter surrender) in a one-year period.

Pro Tips:

- Once you form one or two partnerships, don't be surprised when other organizations begin to reach out to you because the word spreads fast! Be realistic about how many partnerships you can manage and be strategic about which partners you choose, to ensure partnerships are meeting the overall mission and goals of the organization.
- Tell stories! One of the most amazing benefits of partnerships is so simple: Your community will be over the moon with excitement and will want to share your amazing work, which helps you help even more animals and people. Don't forget to slow down long

enough to crow about the magic that happens when you partner with an outside organization.

> PRO TIP: Create co-branded materials that reflect how the organizations are working together that can be shared with people in need and for internal communications: flyers, webpage, resource pages, etc. Tag each other on social media when you share success stories.

- Don't forget the importance of internal communications. Make sure all of your volunteers, staff and other internal stakeholders know the who, what, where, when and why of each partnership and be available to address questions or concerns as they arise.

Examples of partner organizations

- Pet stores and other places that provide pet food and supplies
- Human and pet food banks to provide food for both needs at the same time
- Disaster relief agencies to provide assistance with pets during a disaster
- Parks to use for community or marketing events
- Community centers to use for indoor community events and meetings
- Libraries to use for indoor community events and meetings
- Agencies that deal with death and dying (can be helpful with pet bereavement and compassion fatigue)
- Organizations that provide transportation to pet caretakers (eg. the city bus system)
- Boarding kennels to provide emergency and crisis boarding
- Pet groomers and veterinarians to offer low-cost or free solutions
- Colleges and universities that can provide interns, researchers, and volunteers
- Professional and trade schools (eg. vet tech program) to help expand programming using skilled professionals
- Legal support services like Legal Aid to assist pet owners in need of legal assistance (e.g. tenant's rights situations and breed discrimination)
- Local media to help spread the word about your pet support initiatives
- Private companies that may offer discounted or pro bono services
- Agencies serving people experiencing homelessness to assist in housing for people and their pet
- Organizations that help people experiencing mental health crises
- Hospitals to ensure patient's pets are cared for while they are sick/injured or to create patient visitation programs
- Schools to create student visitation programs, student educational programs and project opportunities
- Assisted living homes to build programming like fostering, neonatal care and more
- Join health care services coalitions and obtain access to training workshops such as escalation, trauma and escalation management
- The HASS Community Partnership Examples List provides even more ideas for potential partnerships

For a more advanced understanding of community partnerships check out this partnership readiness assessment.[1]

Success Stories

Examples of successful shelter partnerships

Gateway Pet Guardians partnered with a local neighborhood program to host a doghouse build though their after-school program for pets in their community.

San Diego Humane Society partners with the San Diego Department of Animal Services to ensure a coordinated response for those in need of resources due to wildfire evacuation.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Animal Care and Control partnered with their local Food Bank on a drive through vaccine clinic.

El Paso Animal Services partnered with El Paso Parks and Recreation and El Paso County Nutrition Program by offering free pet food, microchips and vaccinations to seniors and their pets.

Greenville County Animal Care partnered with Service Dogs for Veterans to take animals from the shelter and train them to be veteran companions.

Cabot Animal Support Services partners with a local lumber yard to provide fencing repair equipment for people who need their fences repaired in order to keep pets from escaping.

Guilford County Animal Services partnered with HealthTeam Advantage to help homebound seniors in their Meals on Wheels Pet Partnership Program.

Humane Rescue Alliance partnered with numerous organizations in their community to deliver pet food and supplies to residents in need during COVID-19.

Humane Rescue Alliance partners with local domestic violence service providers in order to provide support for DV survivors and their pets through their Safe Haven Program.

LifeLine Animal Project partners with Pets for Patriots to provide free adoptions to its members along with gift cards for essential care.

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[1] Giachello AL, author; Ashton D, Kyler P, Rodriguez ES, Shanker R, Umemoto A, eds. 2007. *Making Community Partnerships Work: A Toolkit.* White Plains, http://www.aapcho.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Giachello-MakingCommunityPartnershipsWorkToolkit.pdf, p. 7, NY: March of Dimes Foundation.

Animal Protection Association of Missouri partners with GoodPup to offer one week of free training for new adoptions to help solidify the human-animal bond.

Jacksonville Humane Society partnered with local veterinarians and good samaritans to reduce the number of kittens entering the shelter system.

Palm Valley Animal Society has an ongoing partnership with their local veterinarians from Banfield in order to host their low-cost community clinic, every 2nd Saturday of the month.