



## Community Cat Programming

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## What is Community Cat Programming?

Data that clearly show cats still lose their lives in disproportionate numbers in US shelters, that cats entering shelters are unlikely to be reclaimed by owners, that the species' needs are unique, and that a dramatic change to sheltering practices must occur to achieve significant progress in feline lifesaving. Community Cat Programming provides humane, species-appropriate programs and services to reduce the number of outdoor cats, improve quality of life, keep families together and pets in their homes, reduce shelter intake, and reduce needless feline euthanasia.

### Internally

Diversion and Return-to-Home are the default live outcomes for seemingly unowned cats presenting to the shelter who are determined to be thriving in their habitat. Working within the confines of current local laws and contracts but striving to make changes that better embrace and support these concepts.

### Externally

Trap-Neuter-Return and community engagement shift the focus of the community cat program from in-shelter (only addressing cats that are identified through complaint/concern calls) to the greater population of cats in the community. This may be in-house or in collaboration with existing community organizations.

## What Problem is HASS Community Cat Programming trying to solve?

In the traditional sheltering model, indiscriminate impounding and automatic intake results in the following consequences:

- Breeding seasonality leads to surges in feline intake
- Unsocialized cats are often brought into shelters where traditional adoption is not possible
- Community cats are removed from their families and neighborhoods
- Impounded cats are rarely reunited with their families
- The compounding effect is a national euthanasia rate that disproportionately affects cats

The traditional model sees drastic spikes in cat intake which may result in sickness, mental health decline and stress, shelter crowding, neonatal kitten fatality, and needless animal deaths in shelters. The traditional model is also expensive, and resource-intensive in daily shelter care and feeding of animals who may not need intake.

## Community Cat Program Principals

1. Domestic cats are highly adaptable and can thrive living outdoors when sterilized, vaccinated, and supported by humans. While an indoor lifestyle may be seen as ideal by many, it is not a realistic shift for the millions of cats who lead happy, healthy lives



outdoors, nor for the millions of people who care for these cats. Cats found outdoors are generally best served by providing services to those cats where they are at.

2. Cats are part of the community and are recognized as welcome “neighbors” by residents. With food and shelter support, these cats can thrive and be good ambassadors for a positive relationship between people and cats. While these relationships may not follow traditional concepts of ownership, one or more residents may consider a cat living outdoors “belongs” to them. Consider that not all rental properties allow indoor pets and these cats may serve as de facto pets in these communities.
3. Consider if the judgment being passed on the outdoor living situation of a community cat is also a judgment being passed on the people of that neighborhood.
4. The identity of any particular cat’s caregiver may or may not be known. At times, the identity of a caregiver may be unknown while signs of caregiving are evident. Additionally, many community cats have multiple caregivers who may or may not be known to each other. Often these people have strong bonds with the cats they care for, regardless of the cat’s level of socialization to humans.
5. Community Cat Programs offer an excellent opportunity to engage residents in proactive solutions that save lives, improve the relationship between pets and people, and build collaborative neighborhoods. The shelter engages with the residents, partnering to create more equitable communities and reaching neighborhoods the shelter may have previously not conducted outreach within. Outreach should involve meeting people where they are in the community, face-to-face conversations, and a consistent, long-term presence.
6. Often shelters struggle to categorize a cat as a community cat or a stray/lost/abandoned pet based on behavior. A friendly cat should not be considered lost or abandoned simply because that cat is roaming freely outdoors, as community cats exhibit a range of behaviors, from fearful and disinterested in people to friendly and seeking human attention.
7. Recognizing the abysmal reclaim rate for “stray” cats and the greater likelihood of that cat being reunited with his/her family by means other than intake, shelters should implement protocols that either keep healthy adult cats out of the shelter or limit their entry to return-to-field/home services. Stray hold periods are generally not helpful to these cats. Shelter policies should actively avoid disproportionately [removing community cats from marginalized communities and relocating them via rehoming to more affluent ones](#).
8. It is important to collect information for each cat on intake. This should include a geographic location of where the cat was found. See example stray cat intake forms.

## Where to Begin

Community cat programming depends on your organization, the particular laws and ordinances that govern free-roaming cats in your community, and currently available resources. Here are some things most organizations can do to build community cat programming:



1. Know your data! In order to plan for a new model/Community Cat Program, you need to determine:
  - a. What areas/zip codes/neighborhoods have the highest rate of feline intake and/or public complaints?
  - b. Are there any ordinances or local laws acting as a barrier to community cat programming?
  - c. What is your surgical capacity in your community for large numbers of cats?
  - d. What is your monthly feline intake and in-shelter animal count now?
  - e. What is the monthly live release rate for cats, unsocialized cats, and neonatal kittens?
  - f. What resources do you have now, and what would you need (traps, etc.?) What funding sources are available to you for these programs? Can you reallocate funds from providing care to cats in shelters to providing services to them in the community?
  - g. Consider using this [Community Cat Calculator](#) to help understand the volume of S/N and TNR programs that need to be offered to be successful in reducing the outdoor cat population.
2. Ask yourself if other organizations and/or volunteer groups in the area already performing any aspects of community cat programming. What partnerships can you forge?
3. Immediately halt the deliberate intake of healthy free-roaming cats.
  - a. Animal Protection Officers/ Field Services should only bring in sick or injured felines or cats at immediate risk of unmitigated danger.
  - b. Field Services should use judgment on a case-by-case basis for each unique situation and offer solutions and support for community cat management.
4. Commit to widespread, public service announcements and education on why healthy, free-roaming cats and neonatal kittens should not be brought to the shelter. Provide education, advice, and support services for the community on what they can do instead (free or low-cost sterilization, pet food pantry, conflict mitigation, etc.)
5. Train customer service representatives, front-end staff, Field Services, and intake personnel on speaking to citizens who bring free-roaming cats to the shelter for surrender. This staff will become a resource to divert these unnecessary intakes and explain that the cat/s may be returned to the habitat imminently, and why this is beneficial (to people and cats!) and humane.



6. Create training guides, flowcharts, SOPs, and pathways into and out of the shelter for cats who are brought in. Staff should be trained on which cats are to be intaked for traditional sheltering and which cats are candidates for Return To Home services. Medical services staff should have guidelines for quickly servicing the cats so they may be returned to home as quickly as possible, ideally within 24-48 hours. If internal medical services are not available, who in the community can provide these services that your organization can partner with? SOPs should be written on how the cats will be returned and by whom, with the opportunity to engage volunteers.
7. Identify the high-target neighborhoods or zip codes in your community to begin high-impact TNR work, or partner with private organizations or volunteer groups to focus on these areas immediately for the highest measurable impact.
8. Once the conveyor belt of cats into the shelter has slowed, re-evaluate your feline resources. Can you redirect staff, funds, and space to challenging cats you have never been able to assist before? Can you now launch programs that increase adoption, reduce the length of stay, and provide increased medical or behavioral support to shelter cats?

## Supporting Resources Needed

- **Technology:**
  - Ideally, you will want a shelter database system to enter cats and people served, including microchips, vaccines, health records, and the address of cats. This database of information allows monitoring of the program's goals and can give field staff access to information on previous/ongoing work in the area. If you will begin targeted TNR services, technology tracking your highest intake, or locations of concern, such as GIS heat mapping, will be helpful but not required.
- **People:**
  - People are needed to perform sterilization surgeries if done in-house or to coordinate them if performed elsewhere. Trained staff/volunteers familiar with the guiding principles of a community cat program will be required to be available to answer questions from the community on trapping, scheduling services, conflict mitigation, and transport assistance. This is an excellent opportunity for passionate volunteers.
- **Supplies:**
  - A trap bank for public lending use will be tremendously helpful, as well as the establishment of a “pantry” to disburse cat food for caregivers in need of assistance.



## Potential Benefits of Community Cat Programming

- Reduce citizen complaints regarding free-roaming cats
- Build community engagement
- Grow volunteer support
- Reduce preventable loss of life/increase lifesaving
- Redirect resources onto saving cats previously deemed too challenging
- Reduce the number of animals housed in the shelter
- Reduce intake
- Improve humane care in the shelter
- Reduce shelter illness and disease
- Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Support human health and wellness
- Minimizing impact to wildlife, when viewed as potential for conflict

## What Does Success Look Like for Community Cat Programming?

A successful community cat program takes shape in many forms. Reduced feline intake numbers in the years ahead can be achieved with consistent, dedicated efforts to your new program. Nuisance calls and complaints often drop as mating behaviors are eliminated. Success commonly looks like fewer orphaned neonates being brought to the shelter, and thus, a higher live release rate and lower staff overhead. Less visible, but equally important success can be seen in reduced instances of panleukopenia and FIV/FelV in the community because cats living in the area are now vaccinated and no longer mating. Community engagement and satisfaction with the shelter may elevate with increased lifesaving, increased volunteer opportunities, and proactive management of free-roaming cats.

## Success Story

*For many years, neighbors Alice and Susan had been taking care of a colony of outdoor community cats in their Baltimore neighborhood. Over the years, they had taken advantage of BARCS' Community Cats Program (BCCP) for TNR (Trap, Neuter, and Return) to keep the population both healthy and manageable. One summer, they noticed a new cat had taken up "home" in their colony, and they named him Mr. Hanover. He was a big, smart, unneutered, un-eartipped cat who was not easily fooled into being trapped. However, over the course of a few years, Mr. Hanover went from cunning and agile to weak--he had lost weight and wasn't thriving. Alice and Susan knew that trapping him was now less of a neighborly challenge, but a lifesaving matter. They called BCCP for help and, not long after, Mr. Hanover was caught and in BARCS's care. Even though Mr. Hanover was technically an un-owned, outdoor cat, Alice and Susan had grown quite fond of him and were invested in getting him help beyond TNR--and so was BARCS. An important part of the BCCP program is that only when community cats are healthy and thriving are they returned to their colonies. Mr. Hanover clearly needed more care than neutering and*



vaccines. He was sent to a partnering clinic where he received a number of surgical procedures to fix his ailments. Once stable, he returned to BARCS for continued recovery. Mr. Hanover is not a domesticated pet cat, and while he was somewhat tolerant of his medical procedures, he was very unhappy being indoors. We contacted Alice and Susan to discuss what was best for Mr. Hanover, they agreed that he was best suited for his outdoor life, as they had tried many times to woo him with the charms of indoor living and he was never interested. Because Mr. Hanover's medical care returned him to a state of healthy and thriving, the BCCP team returned Mr. Hanover to his colony, under the watch of Alice and Susan, where he has continued to live happily ever since. --Baltimore Animal Rescue & Care Shelter (BARCS)

## Community Cat Terminology

**Abandoned/Lost** - a customarily indoor cat who is found outside, due to being abandoned or lost, but is not acclimated to living outdoors as evidenced by its overall poor condition or anecdotal evidence provided by a person with credible knowledge of the cat's current or former owned status.

**Caregiver** - any person who provides care, including food, shelter, or medical care to community cats or has temporary custody of community cats.

**Colony** - A word historically used in reference to enslaved people and other colonized people, and also used to describe a group of cats that congregate together. Instead of "colony," we suggest a group of cats, family, clowder, or cluster.

**Community Cat Program (CCP)**: any program that involves the collection of community cats for sterilization, vaccination, ear-tipping, and the return of those cats to the same area in which they were found. CCP may include TNR, TNVR, SNR, RTF, RTH, and other lifesaving programs for outdoor cats.

**Eartip** - An ear tip is the universally recognized symbol of a cat who has been spayed or neutered. While the cat is under anesthesia for spay or neuter surgery the top 3/8 inch of the left ear is removed in a straight line, removing the tip. Some organizations may tip the right ear, or notch an ear. However, the left eartip is the universal symbol, and uniformity in this practice is encouraged. [See the complete Eartip guide here.](#)

**Feral** - a cat that is not exhibiting behavior indicating the cat is socialized to humans and is resistant to or avoids contact with humans.

**Feral versus Friendly.** Early community cat programs often made outcome decisions for cats based on a "feral" or "friendly" categorization. Progressive community cat programs no longer lean on this separation, recognizing both that the determination of a cat's level of socialization with



humans is difficult to assess on intake to a shelter, and that where a cat lies on a feral to friendly behavior scale is not indicative of that cat being at home in the location where the cat was found. Further, behavior and temperament may change over time and circumstance.

**Free Roaming** - Any cat who is outdoors and not confined, regardless of ownership.

**Friendly** - a cat that solicits attention from people, including but not limited to rubbing against legs, holding tail erect, may allow petting and being picked up. These behaviors are also characteristics of a community cat. Friendly behaviors do not compel a cat to be designated as Stray or a Lost Pet and taken into an animal shelter or rescue.

**HQHVSN (High-Quality-High-Volume-Spay-Neuter)** - In HQHVSN, protocols, staffing, and workflow are optimized to provide safe and efficient spay-neuter services.

**SNR, RTF (Shelter Neuter Return / Return To Field\*)** - A shelter-based variant of TNR in which cats arrive at a shelter, typically for surrender or impound, but are instead returned to their original location after sterilization/medical services.

*\*There is a move away from using "field", which is law enforcement jargon for "on the ground" or in the community as opposed to in the office. This can suggest cats are living in meadows and parks when they typically live in neighborhoods. We suggest considering this a subset of Return to Home, the more modern term for return to the field.*

**Stray Cat** - any cat unattended off the premises of its owner; a cat who has "strayed" or gone "astray". Stray is commonly used to mean an owned cat who is suspected to have been abandoned or one who is lost and is without a caregiver, as well as to mean unowned or homeless. Given that many cats who are picked up and turned into shelters as "strays" may actually be owned or otherwise attached to a person, not lost or abandoned, labeling such cats as "stray" may be harmful to those people. Given the multiple interpretations and inaccuracy of the term, use a more descriptive term such as free-roaming, loose, lost, or similar to describe the situation the cat is in.

**TNR, TNVR (Trap Neuter Return, or Trap Neuter Vaccinate Return)** - With trap-neuter-return, cats are caught in humane traps for the purpose of having those cats sterilized, vaccinated, ear-tipped, and returned where they were found to live. The goal of TNR is to humanely manage community cats, preventing the cats from breeding and the population from increasing. The R refers to return and not release. Return emphasizes cats are placed back in the same location where they were found. Release can be interpreted as releasing cats to any location or releasing cats to an organization for adoption.

**Working Cats** are cats who cannot be returned to their original home, are unsuited for traditional adoption, and are adopted out to new outdoor homes in neighborhoods or barns, ranches, stores,





farms, warehouses, etc. Typically, pest control is an attractive feature for adopters of these cats, but many adopt them as outdoor pets, as well.

## Major Elements of Community Cat Programming

### Diversion and Return-to-Field/Home

**Diversion and Return-to-Field/Home** are the basic levels of programming a shelter should have for community cats. Divert intake of healthy adult community cats by redirecting those cats to TNR programs or clinics. This includes diverting a cat from a formal stray-hold impound to an in-house TNR program that does not necessitate the cat being kept for stray hold.

- Lost/abandoned cats are distinguished from community cats by at least one of the following:
  - Cat is wearing a collar with ID tag
  - Cat has a microchip
  - Cat is known to be recently abandoned by a previous owner
  - Cat is actively trying to get into home or building
  - Cat is declawed
  - New to the area where found – has been seen in the area where found for 3 weeks or less
  - Altered without an ear-tip
  - Ravenous appetite
- If intake cannot be prevented, implement return-to-home for adult community cats meeting RTF criteria.
- Animal Protection Officers and Field Services staff limit intake to sick or injured cats, kittens in need, or cats in immediate danger. See the [position of the National Animal Control Association](#) that “indiscriminate pickup or admission of healthy, free-roaming cats, regardless of temperament, for any purpose other than TNR/SNR, fails to serve commonly held goals of community animal management and protection programs and, as such, is a misuse of time and public funds and should be avoided.”
- Kittens can either be returned or placed for adoption, depending on the resources and capacity available to the shelter at any given time, in order to maximize lifesaving. Certain considerations should be taken into account when returning kittens outdoors.
  - [Kitten Rabies Vaccine Statement](#) and [Kitten Evaluation for Return to Home Guide](#).
- Relocating cats is not always successful, is very stressful on the cat, and disrupts the group dynamics which may lead to a paradoxical increase in population. However, a cat who cannot be returned may need alternative placement. In such cases, utilize a working cat program that relocates such cats to new locations such as barns, businesses, or new neighborhoods.
  -



# HUMAN ANIMAL SUPPORT SERVICES

- See Resource: [Maddie's Lifesaving Academy Building A Working Cat Program Online Self-Guided Apprenticeship](#)
- Public-facing workers should be trained in customer service and afforded the appropriate amount of time to explain community cat diversion, return-to-home, and resources available for those looking to provide aid to the cats they are calling about. The goal is not to simply keep the cats from the shelter, but to ensure the cat's ongoing welfare and prevent conflicts from arising among cats and residents. While shelters consistently note community cats to be an ongoing challenge, adequate resources need to be allocated for having meaningful conversations with the public, even when referring the caller to another organization for sterilization services. It is important for public-facing shelter staff and animal protection officers to develop positive relationships with the community in regard to community cats. Shelters are encouraged to establish a task force or working group to include volunteers, staff, community cat caregivers, TNR groups, donors, activists, and all community stakeholders to find solutions and share resources.
- Resources:
  - [Best Practices Playbook](#)
  - [Return-to-Field Handbook](#)
  - [Humane Animal Control Manual](#)
  - [Community Cat Programs Handbook](#)
  - [Training Guide: How To Talk To The Community About Free-Roaming Cats](#)

## Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)

Utilize TNR to build community engagement when managing cats living outdoors but are not yet on a path to the shelter. This shifts the focus of the community cat program from in-shelter, which typically only addresses cats that are identified through complaints or concerns expressed by other members of the public, to the greater population of cats in the community. CCP should strive to be proactive in identifying and building rapport with caregivers and other concerned residents in order to achieve results effectively. This may be in-house or in collaboration with existing community organizations.

- Partner with caregivers and volunteers to participate in TNR. Offer accessible community cat surgical services at your clinic (if applicable). Build two-way communication to ensure ongoing care and monitoring of the cats so that residents feel comfortable contacting the shelter for help when needed.
- Employ high volume and strategic TNR. This approach concentrates efforts in both time and space (geography) and results in a greater impact on community cat populations. Some of the concepts employed:
  - Targeting: Use data points (example: intake by zip code) to determine high-priority geographic areas to focus on.



- Front-loading: Allocate a greater proportion of resources (mass trapping, high volume surgeries) at the beginning of a TNR program in order to more quickly achieve results.
- TNR a sufficient number of cats in the community to impact reproduction rates (75%).
  - Webinar: [Smart TNR: Tracking success to achieve key goals](#)
  - [Simulating Free-Roaming Cat Population Management Systems](#)
- Provide adequate resources such as free or discounted sterilization surgeries for community cats; staff time (coordinate with caregivers/volunteers conducting TNR; field staff and trained volunteers to conduct outreach and to trap cats.)
- Resource: [Pets for Life](#)

## Support for Community Cat Caregivers

Provide additional support for community cat caregivers. Just like pet owners, community cat caregivers need support and safety nets. A CCP can provide this support, helping to maintain the well-being of the individual cats as well as preserve the bond between these cats and their caregiver.

- Access to free or low-cost spay/neuter services. This is especially helpful for caregivers and other neighbors who may be adopting community kittens into their homes.
- Access to a pet food pantry and/or similar options for free or discounted food and supplies.
- Guidance on providing adequate food, water, and shelter; sanitation of feeding sites, etc
- Trap loan programs should allow for mass trapping through the loan of sufficient traps to capture an entire congregation of cats.
- Access to medical care for sick/injured community cats.
- Support for appropriate housing for cats relative to local weather conditions. Free materials or shelter building events, along with volunteer engagement to make and distribute shelters.
  - [Neighborhood Cats TNR Handbook: The Guide to Trap-Neuter-Return for the Feral Cat Caretakers](#)

## Monitoring and management of known groups of community cats.

- Maintain contact information for known caregivers, trapping volunteers, etc
- Identify and prioritize locations in need of TNR
- Monitor health of known groups of community cats
- Ongoing oversight of known groups of community cats
- Data Collection
- [Community Cat Management Overview for Caretakers](#)



## Community Cat Veterinary Care

The widespread sterilization of community cats is key to reducing their populations, reducing the number of cats needing intervention by the shelter, reducing the spread of disease, and bolstering overall lifesaving efforts. Additional veterinary care provided to these cats is also important for reducing potential public health concerns around zoonotic diseases such as rabies and improving the overall health of the individual cats. This may be the only opportunity for care available to these cats and reasonable efforts should be made to provide other services as needed when the cat is being sterilized.

Shelters should develop veterinary policies and protocols specific to community cats as some policies and protocols developed for shelter cats may not be the same or appropriate for cats returning to an outdoor home. If the shelter is utilizing contract veterinarians or partner organizations, the policies and protocols of those clinics should be known and in line with shelter policy in adopting these recommendations. Many veterinarians do not have training in the care of community cats so the shelter may be their best resource for information.

Veterinary care should include:

- Sterilization, spay or neuter surgery.
- Eartip\* ([See the full guide here!](#))
- Rabies vaccination for all cats, regardless of age (excluding Hawaii)
- No routine FeLV/FIV testing
- Recovery time: shelter or caregiver should hold cats at least until the day after surgery but no more than 36 hours unless extenuating circumstances (e.g. extreme weather, third-trimester pregnancy termination, pyometra)
  - Exception: lactating queens may be released same-day if adequately recovered from surgery
- Use absorbable, intradermal sutures which do not have to be removed, and surgical glue if needed.
- FVRCP vaccination (highest priority). This vaccination can save many lives if your community is plagued by panleukopenia.
- Microchipping (second priority). Register chips to your organization rather than individual caretakers.
- Parasite treatment (third priority)

Additional medical care should be provided as capacity allows, with providers aiming to expand services as able.

- Wound care and repair



- Dental work and tooth extraction
- Treatment of acute illness or disease
- Enuclation
- Amputation

## Resources:

- [Fear and loathing and feral fosters](#) Finding the least stressful path for unsocialized cats with health issues
- [APA Feral Rehab, Recovery, and Release](#)
- [APA! Feral/Fractious Cat Handling Protocol](#)
- [APA! Feral/Fractious Cat Treatment Protocol](#)
- [KSMP What is recommended for TNR programs and management of community cats?](#)

## Data Collection

Collecting data on services provided and their impact is critical to ensuring the effectiveness of your programming and ensuring transparency to the community. We want to see what works and what doesn't work so we can build better programs. We need to prove the effectiveness of new programs to obtain funding for them. We want to engage the community by illustrating the power of community cat programming for improving the welfare of cats and people who love them. Personal, identifiable information (including locations of groups of cats) should always be protected, and local laws respected, especially if there is a danger to community cats or caregivers.

## Create Cat Data Parameters

- Collect data on individual cats - for any community cat that enters the shelter for intake or service, include standard data: street address where the cat was found, contact information for the caretaker and/or finder/trapper, date found, cat description, age, condition, medical records, microchip number (if applicable), date and location of return. Include contact information for any person who trapped cats at the location previously, if available. Additional information can be gathered from finders such as the presence of other cats, that can help provide additional services to the community.
- Collect data on cat-related calls - break down tracking of calls to provide a clearer picture of community sentiment/needs regarding cats, using categories such as sick or injured cats, kittens, TNR assistance, and complaint/nuisance

## Create Shelter Data Parameters

Shelter data entry can support the ongoing standardization of community cat data across reporting platforms and nationwide.



# HUMAN ANIMAL SUPPORT SERVICES

- Track community cat TNR locations in order to assess the impact of TNR on population over time. Methods:
  - Mapping - Record found/return locations via spreadsheet, Google Maps, ARC-GIS, or other mapping programs.
  - Caregiver List - Record caregiver contact information in order to allow follow-up, obtain information on new cats, as a reference for stray cat reports or intake, etc
- Community Outreach - Gather data to establish connections with neighborhoods and allow assessment of other needed services (owned pets/housing issues, human services, etc.)

## Additional Resources:

- For collecting data at intake for cats brought in by the public see sample community cat intake forms (see appendix of [Return-to-Field Handbook](#))
- [CatStats Online Community Cat Management System](#)
- [Using Geographic Information Systems \(GIS\) Software To Understand Community Patterns of Animal Health and Shelter Population Dynamics](#)

## Community Cat Legislative Policy Resources

A community cat or TNR-specific ordinance is not necessary as long as one's state laws and local ordinances do not include barriers to such programs. Many provisions once considered standard for animal control ordinances are now considered obsolete, as they do not support the aims of community cat management and public health and safety.

## Model Ordinances

- Allow for community cats to be free-roaming. Healthy cats should not be subject to impound simply due to their being outdoors nor should a cat being "at-large" constitute a nuisance.
- Community cats should not be subject to licensing or registration, pet limits, or other similar regulations typically aimed at "owned" animals.
- Residents should be allowed to care for community cats without unrealistic restrictions being placed on them, such as feeding bans. Often, existing trespass and sanitation laws can address common complaints. Local governments should work collaboratively with caretakers in managing community cats who live on government-owned properties rather than arbitrarily placing restrictions at those sites.
- Shelters and animal protection agencies should be empowered to perform TNR and/or return-to-home programs for community cats. Returning cats to their outdoor home should not be excluded as an allowed disposition. Stray holds should not apply for healthy cats with no discernable identification who are to be returned.



Any ordinance specifically addressing community cats should promote community cat programs as described above. It should not be restrictive, punitive, or otherwise create more hurdles for community members providing care for cats.

When there are existing barriers:

- Advocate for change. Shelters can have a powerful voice in changing the laws that impact the services available to the public. Assistance and advice on making changes to existing laws are available from organizations such as Best Friends and HSUS.
  - While advocating for permanent policy and legal changes that regularly take longer periods of time to implement, recognizing obstacles and potential workarounds to those obstacles can lead to immediate cat lifesaving in your program. Workarounds, such as diverting intake of community cats from the shelter to a veterinary clinic, can give an opportunity to show the viability and success of community cat programs to policymakers while pursuing the permanent policy changes that are needed.
- If barriers only impact government-run organizations, work in collaboration with non-governmental organizations to navigate those barriers.

### **Additional Resources:**

- [Managing Community Cats: A Guide for Municipal Leaders](#)
- [How to Lobby for Trap-Neuter-Return \(TNR\)](#)

### **Internal Training: Talking about Community Cat Programming**

For the past 100 years, animal shelters have taught people that the correct, helpful thing to do when encountering a loose animal outside is to bring them to the shelter, with the assumption that the animal is “lost” or “stray”. As we embark upon a more modern and humane approach to animal services, one that emphasizes keeping families together and meeting people where they are, it is important to understand that we have re-education to do! Understand that when a person brings a free-roaming cat to a shelter, they are almost assuredly trying to help the cat. They may not understand why now, after 100 years of being told to do just that, the shelter is refusing intake or advising them to return the cat to their neighborhood. To that Good Samaritan, this may seem cruel or negligent! With this in mind, we need to change the way we talk about the services being provided to cats. It is not simply that shelters no longer take healthy cats into their facilities, however, shelters now provide different services to help cats and the people in the communities where they live. To view a [complete training guide with sample concerns and responses](#), see our [full guide here](#).



## Community-Facing Resources

The following resources may be beneficial to share with the public or utilize in your organization's public-facing guides, regarding cohabitation with community cats.

- [Deterring Loose Cats: Keeping Cats Off Your Porch and Out of Your Yard](#)
  - This document includes an overview of humane products and techniques that have proven useful in helping to deter cats from entering an area. In order to implement the most effective method for a situation, it's important to consider the specifics of the property and to allow time to test out various options for effectiveness. Some cats are easily deterred and do not return, others may require the use of several products over time.
- [Leave Them Be, a Flow Chart](#)
  - This guide has a flow chart of information regarding best practices if a healthy, loose cat is found in your area.

## Additional Supporting Documents

- **Intake & Diversion:**
  - [HSUS Can You Help This Cat](#)
  - [Million Cat Challenge: Pathway Planning](#)
  - [HSUS Return to Field Handbook](#)
  - [Cat Intake Decision Tree](#)
  - [Stray Cat or Community Cat Decision Guide](#)
  - [PACC Community Cat Info For Field Services](#)
  - [Kitten Evaluation for SNR Guide](#)
  - [Distinguishing Lost Cat vs. Community Cat](#)
- **Handling Criticism & Complaints**
  - [BFAS Community Cat Resource Guide](#)
  - [Customer Service Training on Responding to Cat Complaints](#)
  - [For Shelter Staff: Responding to the Top Ten Concerns About CCP](#)
  - [Cat Deterrent Tip Sheet](#)
  - [Community Cat Programming FAQ for the public](#)
  - [Alley Cat Allies: How To Live With Cats](#)
  - [HRA Cat Deterrents](#)
- **Legal, Policy, and Change**
  - [HASS Community Cat Principles, Definitions, and Positions](#)
  - [Model Community Cat Ordinance](#)
  - [Ordinance Revision Best Practice Guide](#)
  - [HASS Statement of Support of CCP](#)
  - [Community Cat Shelter Law Webinar](#)





- **Health and Medical**
  - [ASPCA Community Cat Medical Guide](#)
  - [HASS Kitten Rabies Vaccine Position Statement](#)
  - [Austin Pets Alive! Feral Rehab, Recovery, and Release](#)