



## Field Services and Public Safety Toolkit

### What does field services mean under HASS?

Animal field service officers, formally known more widely as animal control, are people tasked with protecting both the community and the animals within them. Field services are governed by local ordinances, laws and regulations, as well as internal organizational policies and perform a wide array of services at the intersection of people, animals, and the environment.

Traditionally (the 1850s to 1990s) field services roles were primarily dedicated to impounding animals, tackling cruelty and neglect, getting unsafe animals off the streets, and issuing citations to people violating animal statutes. More recently, these roles have been expanded to include countless other services, including outreach/education, providing supplies and food, helping pet owners access veterinary services, community cat programming, and getting lost pets home quickly and safely.

For the purpose of this document, the terms ‘animal control,’ ‘animal protection,’ and ‘field services’ will be used interchangeably.

### Likely Benefits of Implementation

- Increase public safety
- Reduce intake
- Improve customer satisfaction
- Promote responsible pet ownership
- Build community engagement
- Support human health and wellness
- Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Keep more people and animals together
- Increase the number of animals returned home
- Reduce the number of animals housed in the shelter
- Grow volunteer support
- Improve morale within the shelter
- Increase marketing and media engagement
- Improve the public image of the organization

### Why is Field Services important to HASS?

Many of the laws and ordinances related to animals were written decades ago and do not reflect that pets are considered family members by more than 90% of pet owners. [This poses challenges for today’s animal officers and outreach workers, who have shifted from a primarily punitive \(punishment-based\) to a supportive \(education and help-based\) approach to helping pets and people in their communities.](#) For the purposes of this element, we are referring primarily to animal

protection and animal control officers, though most of this information applies to anyone helping pets and people outside of the shelter walls. In addition, HASS considers field officers among the very first line of defense similar to other first responders, and it is important the welfare industries prioritize their efforts as such.

## **Public Safety**

HASS promotes building safe, humane communities. HASS embraces a [One Health](#) approach which means the health of animals is tied to the health of people and the environment. When animal services focus on addressing root causes that lead to public safety issues, provide resources to keep dogs safely in their yards, and put a high priority on swiftly resolving situations that put people and animals in danger, the community will be safer. Additionally, when communities implement HASS effectively, more animal service related needs will be resolved before they become dangerous to health and safety.

## **What is the National Animal Care and Control Association (NACA)?**

[The National Animal Care & Control Association](#) is the nation's leading association supporting the work of animal welfare field services professionals. NACA is committed to setting the standard in professionalism in animal welfare and public safety through training, networking, and advocacy. NACA believes that carefully selected and properly trained field services personnel can correct pet-related community problems.

NACA provides training, position statements, best practices, camaraderie, and support for animal control officers and all animal welfare professionals.

**How Can I Assess Field Services in My Community?** Here are a few questions you can ask to learn more about your own field services or animal protection/control department. The more YES answers, the more your organization has moved from a punitive model to a helping or support-based model. This is not an exhaustive list, but it will give you some sense of how you're doing and give you ideas to improve!

1. Does your organization have a policy of NOT accepting healthy wildlife for euthanasia?
2. Does your organization treat all animals as individuals, where there are no breed discriminatory policies or practices that apply to only one breed or type of animal?  
<https://www.nacanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/BSL-Guideline-1.pdf>
3. Do officer uniforms and vehicles portray a friendly, supportive demeanor?
4. Do officers come from or represent the communities or neighborhoods where they live?
5. Do outreach or animal control officers provide supportive or relationship-building services to the community?
  - a. Hand out cat and dog treats, leashes, and collars
  - b. [Give out pet food for people who are struggling to feed their pets](#)

- c. Microchip pets in the field
  - d. Provide fence building assistance, dog houses, and cat shelters
  - e. Information on accessible pet resources in your community such as low-cost veterinary services, behavior & training, and pet-friendly housing
6. [Do officers return cats and dogs in the field without impounding them if they are able to locate the owner?](#)
  7. Do officers hang found posters wherever and whenever lost pets are picked up?
  8. Are healthy cats allowed to remain in the community, rather than being impounded?
  9. Does your organization have competitions to see who can return the highest number of animals home in the field without them being impounded?
  10. Does your organization offer alternatives to people receiving tickets or citations? Some examples include positive pet ownership classes, one-on-one conversations and warnings, resources to solve the root cause of the problem, and fix-it tickets.
  11. Does your organization share positive examples on social media and in news releases of the heroic work of animal control officers? These may include rescues of animals in danger, disaster response, saving pets from neglect, and helping keep pets and people together.
  12. Does your organization provide resources like medical vouchers, boarding vouchers, food, supplies, and housing assistance so animal control officers are able to help people and pets in need?
  13. Do you have an auxiliary or volunteer component to your animal control department?
  14. Are volunteers engaged to help get lost pets home?
  15. Do officers receive training on the following:
    - a. Safe and humane animal handling?
    - b. Treating all people with empathy and compassion?
    - c. Communicating with people in crisis?
  16. Do officers choose the least punitive approach related to each situation, reserving impoundment and citations for serious situations involving animal cruelty, public safety issues, etc?
  17. Do officers make efforts to keep pets in their homes whenever possible?
  18. Do officers pick up primarily animals who are sick, injured, or otherwise in danger?
  19. Do officers participate in community events and/or at vaccine/microchip clinics?
  20. Does your organization help transport pets home when the owner is incapacitated or otherwise incapable of driving?

## Implementing HASS in Field Services

### Review the [HASS Core Pathways](#) and any [Existing Protocols](#)

1. Meet with field services staff (and volunteers if applicable) and review HASS methodology.
2. Ask them how they believe this may directly impact their work.
3. Ask officers and outreach people which of the elements they are doing now and which they want to do in the future. Ask them what they need the most.

## Assess your Barriers

1. Do you face external, structural barriers to implementing the HASS elements in your field services? These are things like ordinances, state laws, and regulations that require you to use a punitive approach or prevent you from utilizing a helping or supportive approach? If you do have an external barrier, you will need the help of your organization's leaders to change the law or ordinance.

*Example: "At our organization, animal control officers are required to impound 'feral' cats and once they are brought in, they can only be adopted or euthanized, not returned to the community. Because of this, we euthanize a lot of healthy cats because we have no viable outcome options for them."*

2. Do you face external cultural, advocate, or community resistance to implementing the HASS elements? Possible solutions include increasing communication with stakeholders, holding community meetings, and providing data and research to support your work to all stakeholders, including your appointed and elected officials.

*Example: "We tried to start a trap-neuter-return (TNR) program for community cats, but local rescue groups began writing letters to the County board of supervisors, claiming we should be charged with cruelty and abandonment. The government officials told us to stop releasing cats back into the community based on the advocate complaints."*

3. Do you face internal barriers to implementing the HASS elements in your field services? These may include:

- a. **Resistance from the staff/officers themselves?** Possible solutions: workplace culture agreement, support services written into job descriptions as performance measures, crucial conversations between leadership and officers, positive praise given to those who provide support and help, performance management.

*Example: "My job is to enforce the laws, keep dangerous dogs off the street, and impound animals. Tell me where giving out dog food is in my job description? Besides, why would you want to give a stray animal back to its owner, who was irresponsible enough to lose it in the first place?"*

- b. **Resistance from the leadership of the organization?** Possible solutions: Sharing examples of HASS in field services in other communities, [utilize piloting a program protocol](#), focus on addressing root causes vs. treating the 'symptoms' can prevent recidivism

*Example: "The city council is not paying animal control officers to drive animals home. We have our mandates and our job is to follow them. There's no funding to pay for veterinary care. It's just not our responsibility."*

- c. **Lack of time and resources to try new things?** Possible solutions: Utilize volunteers to help with outreach, lost pet return, and other services. Hold a meeting with shelter and field staff to determine how they can best work together to save time and help more pets and people. Pursue partnerships with human services agencies, your local health department, and others who can help you help more pets.

*Example: "Our jobs are really sad. We only have two animal control officers and the needs are overwhelming. People need so much help and we have nothing to give them, not even food for their pets. I wish I could help more but I don't know how."*

### **Proven Tips from Animal Control and Field Services Professionals**

1. Train your field staff on HASS elements. Prepare to face some resistance, both internal and external, but focus on how HASS programs can address the root causes of the problems. New ideas and approaches may not be immediately embraced as an approach that will yield better results. Share the success that these programs have achieved elsewhere.
2. Review the metrics utilized in appraising the job performance of field staff to focus on proactive measures rather than reactive measures. How are you measuring success now and what needs to change?
3. Develop a culture that prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion both internally and externally. This may include a workplace culture agreement, training opportunities, and one-on-one discussions.
4. Talk to your officers. Explain that officer interactions with the public are fundamental to the success of the HASS model. Through positive interactions with officers that offer education, support, and resources rather than directed or bias-driven strict enforcement, animals and people will thrive and agencies will become an integral part of the animal welfare community.
5. Use data collection and analysis, to understand the needs of the community and develop proven strategies to address core issues resulting in your community being safer for people and animals.
6. Continue to meet all legal mandates for your operations while identifying opportunities to write amendments and changes that support and honor the human-animal bond.
7. Build a strong relationship with the community you are tasked to serve by encouraging team members to visit the same neighborhoods consistently in a variety of supportive activities. It is important that they are seen as allies of the community, not punishers.

8. With improved public relationships, you should expect your field officers will begin to be contacted to assist pet owners BEFORE the need for enforcement arises. Be ready to help when those calls come in!
9. Identify tasks that do not require an officer, where other team members can support. This helps to improve your response time, thoroughness of follow-ups, and customer service.