HUMAN ANIMAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Intake-to-Placement: Streamlining the Foster Adoption Process
Guide developed as part of the Competitive Pet Placement Project

Streamlining the Foster Adoption Process

To increase opportunities for positive outcomes for pets, utilizing foster programs is an impactful way to place more pets in homes, increase pet marketing and visibility from a more natural environment, and improve community engagement. Fostering and other temporary placement programs may contribute to lower length of stay and increased adoption rates by allowing pet personalities to shine with support from their biggest fans, their foster caretakers. To streamline the foster process and increase potential adoptions, consider the following:

- ☐ Clearly define all foster-adjacent programming the organization offers
    - ☐ Foster (general)
    - ☐ Foster-to-adopt or trial adoptions
    - ☐ Day trips
    - ☐ Sitter stays
- ☐ Create low-barrier interest forms and protocols
- ☐ Streamline foster onboarding processes
    - ☐ Reduce mandatory, in-person training
    - ☐ Provide fostering protocols and quick tips during onboarding
    - ☐ Provide emergency contact information
    - ☐ Provide high-level medical and behavioral tip sheets
- ☐ Track foster data
    - ☐ Ensure shelter software data points are consistent (status, intake, outcome, transfer, subtypes, locations)
    - ☐ Evaluate and remove redundancies in data collection
    - ☐ Use collected data to create strategic plans for program enhancements
- ☐ Regularly audit and update existing protocols
    - ☐ Create alignment between foster and adoption policies
    - ☐ Facilitate ongoing training for staff and volunteers
- ☐ Regularly market opportunities to foster

How Organizations Can Begin

Foster Program Examples

- Foster Programming (General)
    - Foster-centric sheltering aims to place 50% or more of animals in foster homes within hours or days of their arrival. Foster care is just as important as adoption in a foster-centric organization. A comprehensive, year-round foster recruitment plan is in place utilizing multiple strategies including marketing and communications.

- Foster-to-Adopt and Trial Adoptions

- ○ Creating an internal process by which a potential adopter could commit to a trial adoption or foster-to-adopt process allows a slower introduction without committing to a full adoption upfront. The pet would be "in foster" but unavailable for adoption for a predetermined amount of time. This process can be less stressful for a potential adopter making a big decision and give a pet a much-needed break from the shelter environment. Programs like these can be especially helpful for long-stay pets, pets with complex medical or behavioral considerations, or pets that are simply being overlooked. If the adoption doesn't work out, that's okay! Encouraging the potential adopter to be a foster and advocate for this pet to instead find a better match can find this pet a long-term positive outcome. The organization can also collect valuable pet information to support future matchmaking efforts.
  - ○ [Sample tip sheet for a "Fur-st Date" program](#)
  - ○ [Fur-st Date Program in Action - Riverside County Animal Services](#)

- [Day Trips](#)
  - ○ Day trips may range from a few hours to an overnight sleepover and most commonly refer to a person giving a pet a break from the shelter environment while providing visibility to potential adopters. Day trips may be used for pets with high stress in the shelter or pets that may get overlooked for adoption. Day trips may be selected by fosters or potential adopters in most cases. Protocols may differ by organization as related to limitations around where the pet can visit during the day trip, such as restaurants.

- [Sitter Stays and Short-Term Fosters](#)
  - ○ In the case of a foster needing to find alternative placement for their foster pet temporarily, instituting a process of "sitter stays," where fosters can be connected with other foster parents and share the date range they need a sitter and arrange handoff, can ensure pets stay in foster homes instead of requiring a space on-site at the shelter facility for temporary boarding. This may operate as your normal foster program where a pet completes an intake and outcome process at the beginning and end of the stay, or the pet may remain assigned in shelter software to the primary foster, and a pop-up or memo with the sitter information is connected to the pet's file.

[Reducing Barriers to Interest Forms](#)

- Individuals can face a multitude of shelter-specific barriers when trying to adopt or foster

pets. These barriers may range from overly-long applications, home visits, references, and other practices that are all too common in the animal welfare industry. **This toolkit** highlights low-lift, immediate, and actionable steps to removing barriers to adoption and fostering and best practices for sharing public-facing information to promote these initiatives.

Foster Onboarding

- Create separate pathways for potential fosters and general volunteer onboarding. This may exempt potential fosters from participating in common volunteer onboarding practices that are not relevant to the foster process.
  - Whenever possible, create virtual opportunities for foster onboarding and training. Reducing mandatory in-person training requirements expands your potential foster pool and creates a more accessible foster program.
- Create a Foster Onboarding Resource Package that includes all organizational policies, foster protocols, tips, and emergency information to share during the onboarding process so all potential fosters are set up for success before taking home a foster pet. Any specific pet information or unique situations can be highlighted during the matchmaking process. This may include:
  - Basic foster protocols
    - Matching a foster with a foster pet process
    - Pet marketing process (bios, photos, videos)
    - Meet and greet process (in-person, virtual, other)
    - Adoption and handoff process
    - Foster sitter stay request process
    - Foster return process
  - Emergency contact information
    - Overnight emergencies
    - Medical
    - Behavioral
    - Foster pet surrender or transfer (emergency / no warning or return appointment possible)
  - High-level common medical tip sheets and monitoring
    - Vaccines
    - Flea prevention
    - Dewormer
    - Cough
    - Skin-related
    - When to contact the organization's medical team
  - High-level behavioral tip sheets
    - Adjusting to a new home environment
    - Meeting other pets (and restrictions) including rules for separation during the initial adjustment period
    - Meeting potential adopters
    - When to contact the organization's behavior team

Data Tracking

- Tracking foster program operations data provides valuable insights into this life-saving program. Ensure all operations protocols are up to date and reflective of the appropriate selections to make when a pet is placed in foster, returns from foster, transfers, is adopted, or participates in a short-term "sitter stay".
- The following table highlights the basics of foster data tracking to get started. These basics can be expanded to include more detailed tracking and monitoring of the effect of the foster program such as:
  - If a foster end reason is adoption, was the adoption from foster (general) or as a result of a trial adoption/foster-to-adopt?
  - Monitor foster interest form submissions. Do they increase seasonally or as a result of planned marketing campaigns?
  - Utilize data collected to monitor trends in length of stay

Data Point	Definition	What it Serves
Foster caregiver	The person record of the foster caregiver, also known as a foster parent.	Identifies a pet's foster caregiver.
Animal record	The animal record for the pet being placed into foster care.	Identifies a pet in foster care.
Foster start date	The date a pet was placed in foster care with a new caregiver.	Informs length of stay, or number of days, in foster care and the number of foster engagements during a given date range.
Foster end date	The date a pet's foster engagement ended.	Informs length of stay, or number of days, in foster care and the number of foster engagements during a given date range.
Foster placement reason	The reason a pet was placed in foster care.	Data for program reporting and development, case management for the pet.
Foster end (outcome) reason	The reason a pet's foster	Data for program reporting

Data Point	Definition	What it Serves
	engagement ended.	and development, case management for the pet.

Creating Consistency Between Adoption and Foster Policies

- Adoption and foster programs both have the same end goal–to create more positive outcomes for pets in care. Creating consistency in both the adoption and foster processes ensures members of the community feel equally supported to participate in either pathway. Consistency may include:
  - Creating complementary policies that reduce barriers for **both** pathways including the interest form process (*as outlined above*).
  - Regularly audit and update existing protocols to ensure alignment between teams.
  - Facilitate ongoing training for foster and adoption staff and volunteers on topics that impact both processes such as matchmaking best practices, data compliance, customer service, emergency protocols, and highlighting high-priority placements.
  - Ensure foster and adoption programs are prioritized and recommended equally.
  - Allow all pets available for adoption to be eligible for foster.
- If pets return to the shelter from foster or adoption, consider requesting all caretakers to fill out a pet report card. This report card can help the organization update pet bios, tags, or other matchmaking-based files.
- Consider organizational structure alignment. Is there an opportunity for foster and adoption teams to work closer together? Is there an opportunity for more collaboration?
  - Foster-Based Personnel Options

Marketing and Communications

- Foster programs are most successful when the community is aware of their options and the process feels welcoming, easy to understand, and supportive. Ensure all foster-based programs are marketed as frequently as other major organizational efforts, such as adoption. Consider these options for enhancing foster recruitment and highlighting foster program options.

Supporting Resources

- [FUR-st date tip sheet - TEMPLATE](#) - HASS
- [Breaking Down Barriers to Positive Outcomes](#) - HASS
- [Pet Report Card Sample](#) - HASS
- [Foster Programming](#) - HASS
- [Offering Resources in Multiple Languages](#) - HASS
  - [2015 Languages Map](#) - LEP
  - [Google Translate](#)
  - [Microsoft Translator](#)
  - [Babylon](#)
  - [Per Mondo](#)
- [PowerPoint Accessibility Guide](#) - HASS
- [Treat First-Time Foster Caregivers Like Trial Adopters and Other Lessons from the Pandemic - HASS](#)
  - Research Highlight: [Emergency Fostering of Dogs From Animal Shelters During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Shelter Practices, Foster Caregiver Engagement, and Dog Outcomes](#): Slightly less than two-fifths of foster caregivers were community members with **no prior relationship with the shelter, and these caregivers were over four times more likely to adopt their fostered dogs** than those with a pre-existing relationship to the shelter