



Community Ecosystem Mapping

What is Ecosystem Mapping?

To fully support families through a Human Animal Support Services model, every animal in a community should have access to services and resources. Additionally, every *person* should have a clear, equitable, and accessible pathway to the services and resources that exist in their communities. Once resources within a community are mapped, shelters can identify current and potential future partnerships and stakeholders, build new connections, and cultivate relationships to fill programming and service gaps.

Ecosystem mapping is the creation of spreadsheets and/or visual maps detailing all community providers relevant to a specific project, in the specific service area. Communities wishing to improve animal services will be able to utilize the “[Ideal Ecosystem Template](#)” to map the existing community support ecosystem.

Ecosystem Mapping fulfills two functions:

- **Case Management**
Your Ecosystem Map paired with a platform like Pets.Findhelp that allows your community to connect themselves with available services they may need, can be used for more effective case management to ensure individuals and their pets receive needed support.
- **Community Partnership**
Ecosystem mapping helps shelters see gaps in available services. As a result, you may learn what future partnerships would benefit your community the most, with the goal of filling identified program and service gaps.

What problem is Ecosystem Mapping trying to solve?

Historically, the community has depended on animal shelters for all pet needs. Animal shelters are overtaxed with requests, yet are under-resourced. The public lacks one central place to locate pet support in their community, leading the shelter to bear the responsibility of providing assistance. Ecosystem mapping can help identify non-shelter human and pet support services in their communities to alleviate the belief that the shelter is the best and/or only place to receive pet support and provide clear alternative options now, and options for the future.

Terminology for Ecosystem Mapping

- **Human Animal Support System:** A Human Animal Support System is an ecosystem of community providers, both human and animal-focused, that fall within the animal welfare agency’s service area.



HUMAN ANIMAL SUPPORT SERVICES

- **Ecosystem:** An ecosystem is a network of service providers, people, animals, and resources.
- **Ecosystem Mapping:** Ecosystem mapping is the creation of spreadsheets and/or visual maps detailing all community providers, relevant to the project, in the service area.
- **Community:** A community is defined as the humans, animals, environment, and service providers of an area.
- **Gap:** A gap is a lack of services, lack of access to services, or a lack of knowledge about services for community members.
- **Geographic Information System (GIS):** A computer system for capturing, storing, checking, and displaying data related to positions on the Earth's surface.
- **Service Area:** Service area is defined as the area that the animal service organization serves.
- **Social Vulnerability:** The potential negative effects on communities caused by external stresses on human health. Such stresses include natural or human-caused disasters or disease outbreaks. Reducing social vulnerability can decrease both human suffering and economic loss.
 - **CDC Social Vulnerability Index (CDC SVI)** uses 15 U.S. Census variables to help local officials identify communities that may need support before, during, or after disasters. (These are the official CDC definitions)
- **SVI:** Social Vulnerability Index

Getting Started

1. Recruit volunteers
2. Gather community resources
 - a. Make a copy of the "[Ecosystem Mapping Full Worksheet](#)" and list all local resources
 - i. Access pets.findhelp.com to locate some existing programs and services. [List and Claim your organization's free and low-cost programs on pets.findhelp.com](#) to better support your community's searches!
 - b. Utilize the following brainstorming worksheets to start thinking through community available resources.
 - i. [Community Partnerships FUN Brainstorming Worksheet](#)
 - ii. [Outlining Existing and Potential Community Partnerships Worksheet](#)
 - c. Review the [Ideal Animal Welfare Ecosystem](#) regularly for ideas
3. Decide on a mapping tool and create a resource map/guide
 - a. Suggested: Google Maps or other GIS
 - b. Suggested: See pages 17-22 of the "[HSUS Pets for Life Community Outreach Toolkit](#)" for a step-by-step guide to building a Google Map for your community
4. Identify focus area
 - a. Compare your resource map to "[Social Vulnerability Index](#)" maps
 - b. Compare your resource map to intake location data maps
5. Determine a strategy for focus areas
 - a. What gaps exist?
 - i. [Brainstorming sheet template](#)
 - ii. [Program/Service gap analysis template](#)
 - b. What else is being worked on in the community / What channels already exist?



- c. Which gap is most pressing?
- d. Which gap is most approachable?
- e. What can be filled by volunteers?
- f. Reach out to the community for feedback on what they feel is most important
6. Create and implement resource strategy for resolving gaps in community services through potential partnerships, referrals, or new program implementation
7. Schedule recurring times to reevaluate programming
 - a. Remember the resource list is a living document and should be updated regularly
8. Communicate with staff and volunteers about the new resources created by this process, how to use them, and highlight support that can now be provided to community members.
9. Advanced Recommendation: Hire a [Case Manager](#) and/or [Social Worker](#)

What does the organization need to consider before getting started?

- How this project fits into your overall mission
- Staffing or volunteer needs
- Hours of commitment available/needed
- SVI - Social Vulnerability Index
- Available access to tools and technology
- Are there available partnerships to pursue this work?
 - Example: Local universities

What is needed to map your Ecosystem?

Technology Suggestions and Examples:

- Computer with internet access
- Demographic data sources
 - [Census Bureau](#)
 - [CDC](#)
 - Local government IT/GIS sites
- Business listings
 - Bulk: [SIC Code and NAICS Code Search | SICCODE.com](#)
 - Bulk: [ESRI'S Business Analyst tool](#)
 - General internet collection (Yelp searches, etc)
- Mapping software
 - [Google Maps](#)
 - [ArcGIS](#)
- Spreadsheet programs
 - Excel
 - Google Docs
- Graphic design program (if desired)

People Suggestions: (Consider making this project volunteer-led)

- Research and tech-savvy staff/volunteers



- GIS-savvy staff/volunteers
- GIS interns/students from local colleges/universities
- GIS consultant for large projects
- Municipal/local government GIS office staff (if applicable)

Utilizing Ecosystem Mapping to Fill Gaps in Community Services

Ecosystem mapping supports those unable to access and/or afford existing pet resources and those who are underrepresented in animal welfare organizations or service areas. All socioeconomic, environmental, and human factors must be taken into account to ensure that organizations are fully supporting their community. Organizations can use this mapping resource by visualizing and analyzing inequities and exploring patterns of both differences and opportunities to provide full and equal access to companion animal resources in their communities. By mapping out your community's resources, there will be a clear way to see where and how to access specific resources that may have been unintentionally overlooked previously.

Ask the following questions when reviewing your resources to ensure you are inclusive of your entire community:

- How are families or individuals of different races, ethnicities, or cultures represented or considered in your resources?
- Are your resources accessible in multiple languages?
- How might organizations use this resource to center diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice in their work?
- What factors may be preventing organizations or community members from marginalized groups from accessing services, support, or resources?
- Are you including members from diverse communities in the process of ecosystem mapping to ensure all resources are accounted for?

Benefits of Ecosystem Mapping

- Improve customer satisfaction
- Reach previously unserved communities and populations
- Reach people who weren't aware of you before
- Save money
- Save staff time
- Build community engagement
- Grow volunteer support
- Improve morale within the shelter
- Keep more people and animals together
- Reduce shelter intake and the number of animals housed in the shelter
- Increase the number of animals returned home or never had to be separated in the first place due to increased community resources
- Promote responsible pet ownership
- Support diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Support human health and wellness
- Utilize the community as the shelter



What does success look like?

A successful Human Animal Support Services Ecosystem Map includes every layer of support as outlined in the “[Ideal Ecosystem Template](#)”. The map should be available for public use as a tool to find needed resources as well as used internally to find gaps in programming that can be filled by your organization or partnerships. Because internet accessibility is a factor, creating printable resource directories is vital. Sharing these resources digitally and in print across the community into neighborhoods, government offices, nonprofits, and businesses will further support pet caretaker needs.

Success Story: Dallas Animal Services

Dallas Animal Services (DAS) utilized mapping to establish a pet food and supplies pantry in Dallas, Texas. DAS identified areas of the community that are food deserts and established relationships with existing human food pantries. Through these partnerships, DAS can reach the community where they are, and provide pet food and supplies, information on accessible veterinary services, and pet identification. In April 2021, the [Pet Food Pantry](#) fed 187 dogs and 68 cats. DAS’ pet food pantry has also created opportunities for volunteers, outreach, and in-person pet support.

Additional Examples

- [Greenville County Pet Resources Map](#)
- [Hub City Animal Project Animal resource Map](#)
- [Dallas Animal Services - Pet Resources](#)
- [LA Animal Services Resource Guides](#)
- [Austin Pets Alive! Human Animal Support Services Resources](#)
- [Jacksonville Humane Society Free & Low-Cost Pet Help Resource Guide](#)
- [HSUS Pets For Life Community Outreach Toolkit](#)