

Pet Support Services

Field Services Transporting Owned Pets

Overview

When pet owners struggle to find transportation, having a free option to bring their pets to veterinary appointments, temporary boarding facilities, or other supportive services can help the pet obtain needed care and may help someone keep their pet instead of requesting to surrender.

Transportation Examples

There are many types of scenarios where transportation may be helpful or even critical. Some requests may be urgent, while others may allow you generous time for planning. Consider these real-life examples.

- Non-urgent: A matted pet with no access to appropriate grooming.
- Urgent: A matted pet that has intense discomfort and struggles to move freely and eliminate due to the condition of the fur.

Getting Started

Transportation services can be integrated into field services operations in various ways. Consider the following examples when creating your transport process. Update protocols where able.

- Reserve one holding area in the field services vehicle that can accommodate up to a large dog.
- Process transport requests by appointment in a sheet shared by field services and the local shelter.
- Accept requests via online form, in-person, or phone interactions.
- Sort requests by service area, zip code, or neighborhood for efficiency.
- Create clear guidelines for eligibility. Consider those that are physically limited, do not own a vehicle, and are not near public transportation (or if pets are not allowed on public transportation) the highest priority.
- If an overwhelming number of requests are submitted, use this data to advocate for specialty positions (part-time, full-time, volunteers) whose exclusive role is helping transport owned pets to prevent unnecessary surrender.
- Integrate volunteers whenever possible. As needed, integrate a liability waiver and permission slips. Volunteers may also create a program that operates independently of Animal Services and use officers and shelter staff as a trusted resource to help establish protocols for the safe transportation of pets.

- Refer pet owners to local [pet-friendly rideshare](#) options if a lack of transportation, not financial challenges, is the reason a pet owner cannot transport their pet.
- Consider local partnerships. For example, a local emergency veterinary clinic may consider assisting with transportation for clients who need their services.

Note: Transportation options may vary depending on your organization’s current local and state regulations, vehicle restrictions, potential liability, or other legal considerations. If this process is not allowed due to state or municipal restrictions, advocate for legislative changes to reflect more supportive and community-oriented alternatives. See our [Government Communications Guide](#) to get started.

Supporting Research and Resources

- [Access to Veterinary Care—A National Family Crisis and Case for One Health](#) (Blackwell & O’Reilly, 2023)
 - “Due to the significance of the human-animal bond in our society, the lack of veterinary care negatively influences both human and nonhuman members of communities.”
 - **“More than 1 out of 4 families struggle to access veterinary care in the United States.”**
 - “Barriers to veterinary care are human-related, requiring a One Health solution.”
 - “Access to veterinary care is the social justice call to action of veterinarians”
- [Goodbye to a Good Friend: An Exploration of the Re-Homing of Cats and Dogs in the U.S.](#) (Weiss et al., 2015)
 - **“Services that might have helped pet retention** were examined for the lower income category since the services listed were all described as free or low cost. **The service that was selected most commonly as something that might have helped respondents was free or low cost veterinary care (40%).** Other service options were free or low cost training or behavior help (34%, more common for dog owners), access to pet friendly housing (33%), free or low cost spay/neuter services (30%), free or low cost pet food (30%), free or low cost temporary pet care or boarding (30%) and assistance in paying pet deposits (17%).”
- [The Impact of the Social Determinants of Human Health on Companion Animal Welfare](#) (McDowall et al., 2023)
 - “In a study of rehomed companion animals, **40% of the participants identified that free or low-cost veterinary care could have prevented relinquishment [57].**”
 - “The proposed integrated framework considers the interconnection between the social determinants of health, One Health, One Welfare and the five domains of animal welfare, providing a model for a more comprehensive approach to better outcomes for companion animals, their guardians and the community.”
- [More Than a Pet](#) (The Humane Society of the United States, n.d.)
 - “20M+ pets live in poverty and that’s three times more than the number who enter animal shelters every year.”
 - “70% of pets living in poverty have never seen a veterinarian.”
 - “28% of pet owners are unable to access veterinary care.”
- [Human Animal Support Services \(HASS\) Releases Community Values Survey Results](#) (Human Animal Support Services, 2023)
 - “In fact, **71% of pet owners could not afford nor had access to** the means necessary to meet their pets’ needs with the **largest barrier being accessibility to affordable veterinary care of all types.** These results point to communities in distress and in agreement for the prioritization of offering direct assistance when care grows beyond the capabilities of pet owners.”