



**SAVE
THEM
ALL**



GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT: A GUIDE TO CREATING COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITIES FOR PETS AND PEOPLE

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[see video here >](#)

INTRODUCTION

WHY EVERYDAY PEOPLE ARE THE KEY TO SAVING PETS IN ANIMAL SHELTERS

From viral cat videos to heartwarming stories about kids reading to their dogs, Americans love pets. Each year, we spend hundreds of millions of dollars on dog walkers, pet spas, gourmet food, professional pet photos, pet-friendly hotel rooms, cat apps for our phones and monogrammed dog beds. Whether you live in a rural community in Iowa, a college town in Texas, a retirement community in Florida or a high-rise in New York, you see pets every day and can appreciate the unconditional love and joy that they bring to our lives. Because of that, most of us easily agree that dogs and cats deserve compassion and a good quality of life.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING EFFORTS TO SAVE DOGS AND CATS IN SHELTERS

In the 1980s, an estimated 17 million pets were killed every year in America's animal shelters simply because they didn't have safe places to call home. Today, that number is around 733,000. We've made tremendous progress, but about 2,000 dogs and cats are still being killed every day in shelters. Together, we can change that. Individuals and organizations around the country are coming together to take collective responsibility for the welfare of pets in their communities.

ADVOCATING FOR COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITIES FOR PETS AND PEOPLE

This manual offers a blueprint for organizing people to save dogs and cats in communities of all shapes and sizes throughout the country. No individual organization, including an animal shelter, can or should be solely responsible for the welfare of local pets. Only by working together can community members and stakeholders ensure that every pet who can be saved is saved and given a safe place to call home.

A well-organized community equipped with the right resources can effectively share critical information, work collaboratively with local animal shelters and other community organizations, and advocate for humane policies and legislation. [Learn more about the goal to achieve no-kill nationwide by 2025](#) and [join the 2025 Action Team](#) to help pets and people in your own community.

In addition to this manual, here are two key resources to use as you need them once you have connected with your local animal shelters and your advocacy efforts are up and running:

- [Community Cat Programs Handbook](#)
- [Gap Analysis Tool for animal shelters](#)

Animal services are human services. From providing affordable veterinary care for dogs and cats to creating animal-friendly ordinances and outreach that help people keep their pets at home, addressing animal-related issues is essential to the health and well-being of every community. And when passionate individuals armed with the right information engage on behalf of pets, elected officials and other decision-makers will listen.

Together, we can create compassionate, no-kill communities nationwide for dogs and cats and the people who love them.

EFFECTING LOCAL CHANGE REQUIRES LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS.

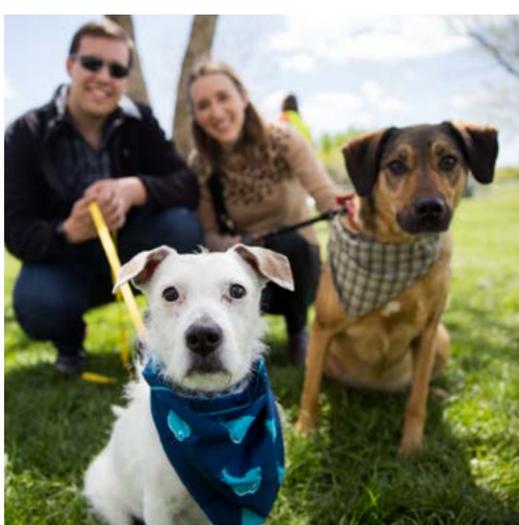


CHAPTER 1

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING TO HELP HOMELESS PETS



[see video here >](#)



Adopt your next dog or cat. Foster a pet. Volunteer at your local animal shelter. These are all things we know we can do to help homeless pets. But what does it really look like to take action on behalf of animals in your community? What can you do as an individual?

How can you collaborate with your local shelter, community groups and local businesses to create long-term, lifesaving change? How do you know what kind of support to provide or what type of help is needed the most? How do you get other people to listen to you and join your movement? Can you really make a difference?

Anyone can be an advocate for pets as long as they are willing to learn, listen and connect with others. No one individual or organization can save homeless pets alone. But by working together with all of the different stakeholders in your community, you can inspire others, create a local movement, and ensure lifesaving progress and sustainability. Your voice is more powerful than you think. You just need to know how to use it effectively.

CONNECTING WITH YOUR LOCAL ANIMAL SHELTERS

When your goal is to help save pets in your community, developing a relationship with your local shelters is a critical first step. It can be easy to assume that you know what your shelter is or isn't doing and how to fix things. But like any other community-based institution, animal shelters are part of an interrelated system of public services that usually operate with limited resources and under certain constraints.

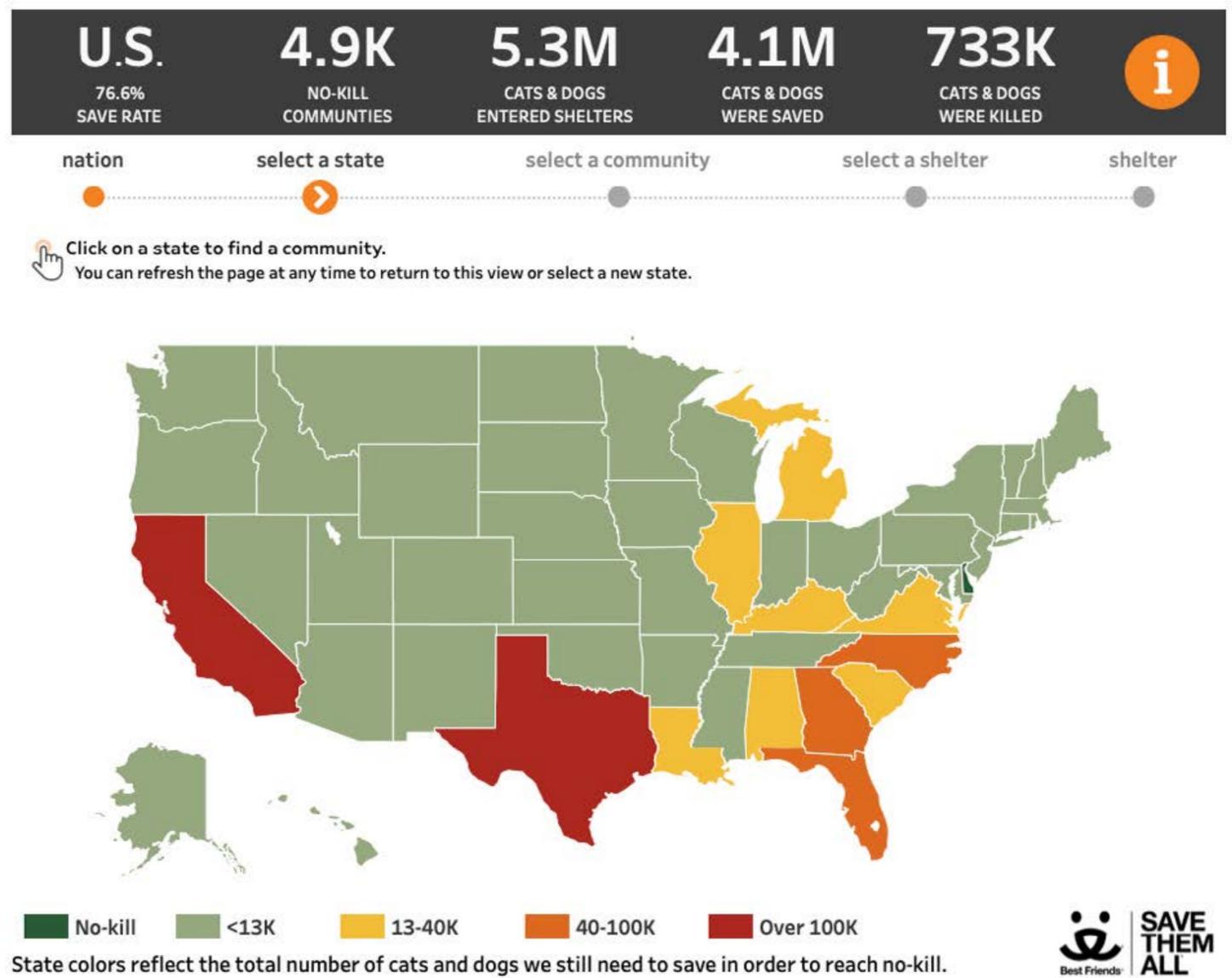
To begin, identify all the shelters serving your community and find out where they are located. Depending on the size of the city you live in, there may be just one shelter or your community might be served by several. Next, seek out the answers to the following questions:

- Are the shelters public or private?
- How many animals are the shelters taking in each year and how many are they saving?
- Are those animals mostly dogs? Mostly cats? An equal number of each?
- Is your local animal control or protection agency also managed through the shelter or is it managed by another agency?
- What lifesaving programs do your shelters already offer?
- What kind of additional programming and support do they need?
- Have you looked at the shelters' websites to see what information they provide, what the structure of their leadership team is, and what kinds of community partnerships they currently have in place?

CHAPTER 1 [CONTINUED]

Whether your local shelters have already achieved no-kill or they are struggling to implement basic lifesaving programs, establishing a positive, judgment-free relationship is essential. Every shelter (and community, for that matter) faces different challenges and has different resources at its disposal. Some shelters have the luxury of operating as nonprofit organizations in resource-rich communities, while others are bound by the limitations of municipal contracts and serve densely populated areas with very few resources. [Chapter 3](#) covers issues related to local laws and ordinances that affect pets in the community.

Meeting local shelters where they are, keeping an open mind and focusing on shared goals will help you build a working relationship with all relevant parties that can be sustained into the future.



USING THE COMMUNITY LIFESAVING DASHBOARD

Best Friends' [community lifesaving dashboard](#) is the nation's first comprehensive and dynamic data visualization tool for animal shelters across the country. You can use the dashboard to locate shelters in your city, county and state, and view critical information you'll need as a starting point, such as how many animals are entering a shelter and how many of those are being saved.

Many animal shelters are familiar with this dashboard and have provided their data and information for it. Other shelters may not be aware that it exists, although their pages on the dashboard may still provide their data and information, retrieved from public sources. In either case, it's best to use the dashboard to identify your local shelters first, with the goal of building a relationship with them. And once that has been established, the shelter's lifesaving data listed on the dashboard can then be discussed.

When every shelter in a community achieves a save rate of 90% (or more) for all cats and dogs, that community is designated as no-kill. This provides a simple, effective benchmark for measuring lifesaving progress in shelters across the country.

Below are some things to look for and think about when viewing the dashboard and collaborating with your shelter.

IS YOUR COMMUNITY ALREADY NO-KILL?

If so, it likely needs additional community support to help sustain and further increase that lifesaving success. This support may involve working to change local ordinances to prevent breed-discriminatory housing or zoning policies, or addressing the problem of local pet stores selling dogs from puppy mills.

CHAPTER 1 [CONTINUED]

REGARDING THE ANIMALS WHO ARE NOT BEING SAVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY, IS THE NUMBER GREATER FOR CATS OR FOR DOGS?

If it's cats, this might indicate that your community has a need for a [community cat program featuring large-scale trap-neuter-return \(TNR\)](#) or a newborn kitten program that helps keep fragile kittens out of the shelter environment and places them in foster care instead.

If dogs are being killed in greater numbers in your area, there may be a need for more affordable spay/neuter services to prevent unwanted litters of puppies or a behavior and training program to help dogs successfully transition from the shelter to homes of their own.



IS THERE DATA MISSING FOR YOUR COMMUNITY?

If your community and/or local shelter has a status of “waiting on shelter data” on the dashboard, this means that some of the data hasn't yet been provided. Your shelter can provide its data using the [shelter data update form](#).



[see video here >](#)

The dashboard contains an abundance of useful information. You can review [frequently asked questions about the term 'no-kill' and the data methodology](#) for the dashboard. It also includes national lifesaving data, an overview of the common elements of a no-kill community and a [short video on working together to save more pets](#), all of which can serve as great conversation starters when connecting with fellow community members and stakeholders. In addition to viewing the lifesaving status of your own community, you can see where it stands in comparison to other communities across the country.



CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND LOCAL BUSINESSES

[see video here >](#)

Just like creating relationships with shelters, building relationships with others in your community is key to your success and can only be done by establishing trust, understanding and open dialogue. It's easy to assume we know everything about the people we live near, but if your goal is to help more pets, save more lives and create lasting change, you need to approach things with fresh eyes and an open mind. So, don't assume anything and try to lead with compassion.

Don't assume anything. When Best Friends staff first started visiting communities in Coachella Valley in California as part of a new community cat program, they learned about a large cat colony living near a mobile home park. Up to that point, nobody had approached the mobile park residents about the cats. A local shelter volunteer claimed that the area wasn't safe and that the residents would not be receptive to helping the cats. An advocacy team member hung some door hangers in the mobile park anyway.

In reality, the place was a cat-loving mecca. Cats were lounging happily around the homes and being fed by residents who had little to no income. The park manager confirmed that everyone loved the cats and would welcome a TNR program.

Whether it's a specific neighborhood, type of business or local community group, nobody should be overlooked in your organizing efforts. You'll be surprised and delighted to see just how many people are happy to help local pets, and how many are already doing so in their own ways.



[see video here >](#)

“PEOPLE WANT TO HELP, BUT DON'T ALWAYS KNOW WHAT TO DO ...”

– Rebecca, 2025 Action Team member



Lead with compassion. When we see someone with a dog who has not been neutered, it's easy to assume that individual hasn't taken his dog to be neutered because he doesn't want to or doesn't appreciate the importance of spay/neuter. Often, however, an unsterilized pet is simply the result of limited resources or lack of education.

Many communities lack affordable spay/neuter services for local residents. People who are struggling financially may be making a choice between paying for an expensive surgery or paying for their pets' food. In some cases, food banks for people have seen local residents starve themselves because they are feeding their pets first. As a result, many food banks have created services for people's pets, too.



There may also be people who are initially resistant to certain lifesaving programs because they don't know how they work and are worried that they may conflict with their own personal needs. [Check out this story about a veteran living in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana.](#) The man was initially resistant to a community cat program, but he embraced it once a program organizer took the time to talk with him.

Effective lifesaving programs and services for animals and people always go hand in hand. To help people, you often need to help their animals, too. To help animals, you often must help the people who care for them and share their lives with them. Judgment and bias close doors; trust and compassion open them.

Whether you're interacting with local businesses and organizations or individual people, view everyone as a potential member of your action team, as someone with a unique set of skills and experiences to bring to your lifesaving efforts. When you think outside of the traditional animal welfare box and look to the full spectrum of community groups, local businesses and entities available to you, everyone becomes an ally and you increase your lifesaving potential exponentially.

CREATIVE AND DATA-DRIVEN PROGRAMMING TO HELP SAVE PETS

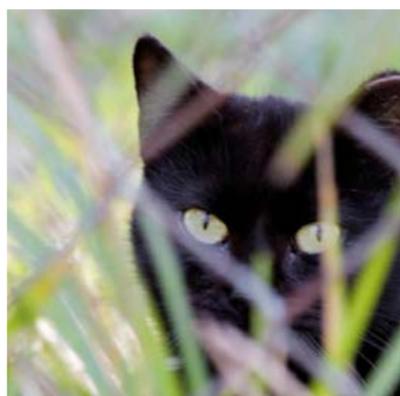
When you're thinking about programs that help pets and have major impact, think big, but also be practical, strategic and supportive. For many shelters, meeting essential day-to-day needs (e.g., feeding the animals, cleaning kennels and providing basic medical care) may be all-consuming, leaving no time to think about and plan for other things. Helping your shelter to first manage these basic day-to-day challenges is necessary before asking the staff to tackle big ideas and changes.

It's also important to make sure that any programming you're thinking about is always driven by your community's actual needs. Be as innovative and ambitious as you like, but be sure that your ideas are always connected to a concrete need that will help more pets and people. For example, if the shelters in your community are already saving almost 100% of cats and have no difficulty finding homes for cats, but they are still struggling to get dogs adopted, then opening an adoptable cat café probably isn't a priority.

CHAPTER 1 [CONTINUED]



[see video here >](#)



For bigger projects that will require a lot of planning and resources, try breaking down the individual steps and pieces needed to make it more manageable for the people who will be implementing it. For example, starting a comprehensive community cat program can be overwhelming. Start by first gathering information using tools like the [Community Cat Programs Handbook](#) and then tackle the steps one at a time. These steps might include passing a local ordinance to allow trap-neuter-return, raising money to purchase humane traps, and recruiting and training a volunteer trapping team.

Following best practices and implementing programs that have been proven to save lives are always the way to go, but it's also important to think creatively and look for new ideas for tackling tougher issues when the need arises.

A big piece of creating a compassionate community for pets and people is a willingness to think beyond the walls of the animal shelter. When most people think about ways to help save more pets in shelters, they think about what's happening at the physical facility. But having a long-term lifesaving impact requires programmatic solutions that reach beyond the shelters themselves and into the surrounding communities. Below are some examples of creative community-based solutions for saving pets in shelters.

Dog running clubs at shelters. Some shelters struggle to provide larger, more active dogs with enough enrichment opportunities to keep them mentally and physically stimulated while waiting to be adopted. To address this problem and help get more dogs adopted, some shelters allow volunteers to take dogs for runs through the neighborhoods surrounding the shelter. In addition to providing the dogs with much-needed exercise, these programs create local awareness and visibility for the shelter (the dogs wear "Adopt me" vests while running) and lead to adoption matches and positive media coverage. For an example of such a program, [read about the dog running club at the Best Friends Lifesaving Center in Atlanta.](#)

Fence repair brigades to help lost and loose dogs. Picking up and bringing in lost and stray dogs can be a huge burden on animal control officers and a drain on resources when those dogs are admitted to the shelter. Often, the dog is just an adventurous spirit who escaped a yard with a broken fence or an unsecured gate. Some communities are creating networks of volunteers and participating hardware stores willing to donate time and supplies to repair fences and gates. By working together to complete simple repairs that pet owners might not have the money or skills to do, these community members are keeping pets with their people and helping to reduce the number of stray dogs entering shelters.



MEET ADOPTERS WHERE THEY ARE: BRING PETS OUT TO LOCAL BUSINESSES

Community-based pop-up adoption events. Bringing adoptable pets to potential adopters rather than expecting people to come to the shelter is a great way to save more pets and increase community awareness and engagement. Pop-up events involve partnering with local businesses to host adoption and outreach events inside local retail stores and other public venues with heavy foot traffic. In many cases, people who are uncertain about going to an animal shelter to adopt will happily visit a popular local business to meet their new best friend. For an example, [read about a partnership with Urban Outfitters to help find homes for adoptable cats from Animal Care Centers of New York City.](#)

Familiarizing yourself with your community's lifesaving needs, building collaborative relationships with your local shelters and fellow community members, and approaching things creatively and thoughtfully are the building blocks for a successful grassroots advocacy effort. Once those elements are in place, you're ready to tackle some of the big-picture issues that are essential to community-based lifesaving for dogs and cats.



[see video here >](#)

CHAPTER 2

STARTING A LOCAL 2025 ACTION TEAM CHAPTER



The **2025 Action Team** is a nationwide grassroots movement working to help every shelter in every community achieve no-kill for dogs and cats by the year 2025. If you're ready to form an action team to help save the lives of more pets in your community, read on. This chapter contains tips for getting started.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ANIMAL ISSUES AFFECTING YOUR COMMUNITY

As noted in [Chapter 1](#), it's important to do your research first to determine what the animal-related issues are in your community. Connect with local shelters and other animal welfare groups. Find out if there are other individuals or organizations already working to solve those issues and see if you can join forces. Community-based efforts should always be collaborative, not isolated. **Effecting local change requires local stakeholders.** Getting support from groups outside your community can be helpful, but ultimately the change must come from within.

IDENTIFY OTHERS TO HELP LEAD LIFESAVING EFFORTS

Look for like-minded people in your community who are equally passionate about the issues you're working to address, but who also have diverse perspectives and complementary skill sets. **To ensure maximum engagement and impact, your leadership team should be representative of the various types of people in your community.** If your fellow leaders look and think just like you and share identical perspectives and experiences, you're less likely to reach a broad range of people and make a difference.

GET THE WORD OUT

Spread the word and network, network, network. Create email distribution lists with friends, family and acquaintances, and share relevant information, resources and events. And, of course, remember to be respectful of people's time and allow them to opt out when they choose. Use your social media channels to announce your action team and keep people informed with updates and initiatives that require their support. Connect with other social media pages that share similar goals and interests, and encourage people to get involved. Review [Chapter 8](#) for an in-depth discussion on effective online advocacy.

CHAPTER 2 [CONTINUED]

ORGANIZE ACTION TEAM MEETINGS

While you can accomplish quite a bit over the phone and online, it's still essential to meet in person regularly to ensure progress and effective coordination. Your action team meetings should have a sense of urgency and importance attached to them, rather than a more casual or optional feel.

DETERMINE GOALS AND STICK TO AN AGENDA

Every team should have agreed-upon short-term and long-term goals, and every meeting should have an agenda that is mindful of those goals. When we're particularly passionate about an issue or topic, that's often all we can and do talk about. And the more people you involve, the more topics will come up for discussion. So, keep things organized and on topic while reassuring people that there is room for everyone to be acknowledged and heard.

AGREE ON SHARED PRINCIPLES

What does your team stand for? What will you be working to achieve? We recommend incorporating these two guiding principles into your team's objectives:

- Only by working together can we get our community, and eventually the nation, to no-kill.
- To do this, we need to be positive, empowering and fair.

AGREE ON HOW YOU WILL COMMUNICATE

Your team members need to be able to reach each other to keep up to date and coordinate. To that end, consider creating a private [Facebook group](#), a [Google group](#) or a [Slack team](#). The possibilities are endless, but use whatever communication tools your folks are most comfortable with.

DETERMINE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Assign roles and responsibilities to your team members based on their interests and skill sets. It's important to give people the opportunity to contribute in ways that keep them engaged and successful. And assigned roles help you avoid having too many cooks in the kitchen for any one task. Some questions to ask might be:

- Does anyone like to organize events? Anyone who likes attending and assisting with events?
- Are there people interested in attending meetings and hearings or speaking at legislative events?
- Is there someone interested in writing blog posts or op-eds and letters to the editor for local papers and other media?
- Is there someone who might want to make calls, host events or spend time engaging on social media?

We recommend the following roles as a good starting point:

- **Group coordinator** (1-3 people): To coordinate all communications and track team progress
- **Designated media spokesperson** (1 or 2 people): To track, attend and speak at community meetings and hearings and to interface with local press
- **Designated social media lead** (1 or 2 people): To coordinate all communication and engagement through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social channels
- **Event coordinator** (1 or 2 people): To track and coordinate group participation in community events

RECRUIT MORE ACTION TEAM MEMBERS

Once you have some key roles assigned, step up your team recruitment game. Ask current team members to send emails and connect via social media with their personal networks to help grow your team. And don't forget to take advantage of face-to-face recruitment opportunities. Grab a table at a farmers' market. Get out in your neighborhood and talk to people. Some people might ignore one more message or Facebook invitation, but they'll listen to what you have to say in person.

Finally, remember to recruit a diverse team that is representative of your community and the people who call it home. Think beyond your usual social and professional circles to other neighborhoods, groups and people whose interests might intersect with your own.

TIP: THINK BEYOND YOUR USUAL SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL CIRCLES



CHAPTER 3

SUPPORTING A LIFESAVING ANIMAL ORDINANCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Advocacy is the act of building public support for a certain cause or policy. We often hear from people who are reluctant to call or email their elected city council members or state representatives because they think their opinions won't matter or their voices won't be heard. But as history continues to teach us, that is simply not the case. Anyone can make a big difference. As a voter, your opinions matter to the people who represent you. This chapter covers everything you need to know about working to effect change in your community through the legislative process.

Having animal-friendly legislation in place is important to any long-term advocacy efforts. If we want to help local pets, we have to make sure that (1) there aren't any current laws hindering us in our efforts to do so and (2) there are laws in place that help maximize that work. For example, some communities have outdated animal ordinances that prevent the implementation of trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs for cats. Other places have problematic laws that require animal control officers to take any stray dogs directly to the shelter (further contributing to shelter overcrowding) rather than working to return the dogs to their owners in the field.

It's also important to understand how big of an impact advocating for humane legislation can have. **While every animal is an individual and a life worth saving, we have to think beyond just saving one animal to long-term change that ensures the safety of hundreds of thousands.** For example, we can rescue a pit bull terrier in a city with a breed ban in place. Or we can work together to convince the city council to pass legislation that prohibits breed discrimination and champions a more progressive ordinance focused on responsible pet ownership and public safety. The passage of that one piece of legislation will save thousands of dogs and continue to do so indefinitely.

You can help save cats and dogs in your community by working with your city council or other governing body to create a lifesaving animal ordinance. The following steps provide a road map for enacting a lifesaving ordinance in your city or county.

1. DETERMINE YOUR GOAL

The first step to creating a lifesaving animal ordinance is determining your goal. What are you hoping to achieve? What makes sense for your community? (For more on this topic, see [Chapter 1](#).) Every situation is different, and every community has its own unique needs.

For example:

- Are there pet stores selling companion animals in your community? You may want to enact an ordinance to ban the retail sale of commercially bred puppies, kittens and rabbits in pet stores. [Email \[puppymillinitiatives@bestfriends.org\]\(mailto:puppymillinitiatives@bestfriends.org\)](mailto:puppymillinitiatives@bestfriends.org) for more guidance on this topic.
- Are people selling animals on public streets or at swap meets or flea markets? You might want to enact an ordinance to prohibit the sale of animals in those locations.
- Are feral and stray cats (aka community cats) entering shelters in high numbers? If so, you can pursue an ordinance that removes barriers to implementing a trap-neuter-return (TNR) program.
- Does your city or county have breed-discriminatory policies in place that target certain breeds of dogs, such as pit bull terriers?

CHAPTER 3 [CONTINUED]



Talk to people at your local animal control agency or municipal shelter. What do they see as the greatest need? Where are the animals in their facility coming from? And remember to keep it simple. The more things you try to include in your ordinance, the more opposition you will invite. And the more complicated the ordinance is, the more resistance it will receive from legislators.

2. DO RESEARCH AND GATHER DATA

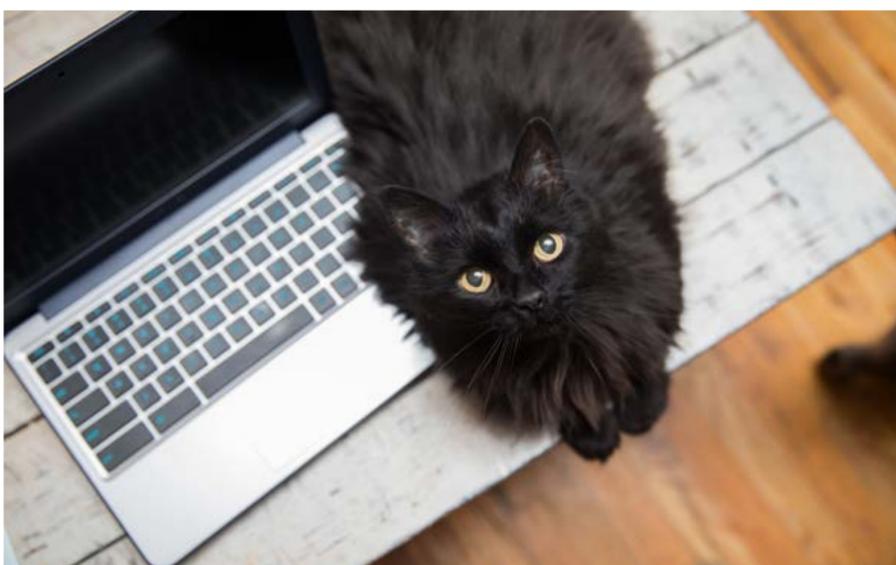
Start the process by gathering as much information as possible about the current state of animal welfare in your community. How many shelters are there? How many cats and dogs are entering the shelter(s) each year and how many leave alive? [Use the community lifesaving dashboard mentioned in Chapter 1 as a starting point for your research.](#)

You will need to consider what kinds of laws are already in place. You can identify local codes at [municode.com](#). You'll want to [find out whether your state operates under home rule or Dillon's Rule](#). This information will determine what kinds of local ordinances can be enacted in your community.

You will also need to know how your community's legislative process works. Is your governing body a city council, a county council, or a board of commissioners or supervisors? Is the mayor a separate elected official or a member of the council? (For the purposes of this guide, local governing bodies will be referred to as city councils or councils.)

Visit your community's official website and look at previous meeting agendas to see what kind of issues the council has taken up in the past, and how the council members have voted on those issues. This could give you valuable insight into how they might respond to your proposal.

**DO YOUR HOMEWORK:
FIND OUT HOW
YOUR COMMUNITY'S
LEGISLATIVE PROCESS
WORKS**



3. PROPOSE YOUR ORDINANCE

Generally, a local ordinance starts with either an elected official or a member of the public introducing the proposed ordinance to the governing body. That means you can choose to either meet with an elected official (or a member of the staff) and ask him/her to introduce it, or you can introduce it yourself at a public meeting of the governing body.

Meet with a public official

Some city councils are set up so that each member represents a district within the community, while others are "at large," which means the entire body represents the entire community. For the former, you would ideally meet with your own representative, but any member will do, as long as that person is animal-friendly.

You've already done some research on the governing body as a whole, but now you will want to research the individual members. Check their voting records, search for newspaper articles online about them and visit their websites. You might find out something useful that could help you determine with whom to meet (for example, one of them may have a rescued dog).

Here are some other details to consider:

- What are their special interests?
- Are any of those interests relevant to what you're proposing?
- How long are their terms of office?
- Are they running for re-election?

CHAPTER 3 [CONTINUED]

To initiate the meeting, start with a phone call. You can find contact information for elected officials on your city or county website, through a phone call to the city or county clerk's office, or through [Ballotpedia](#). Phone calls are often the most effective means for communicating with public officials about specific issues. Identify yourself as a constituent and try to set up an in-person meeting to discuss your idea further.

When you meet with the council member for the first time, explain the issue briefly but thoroughly. Be prepared to discuss why your proposal would be good for the community. Public officials are often incredibly busy, and they're approached frequently with ideas about a range of issues. So, it's best to be prepared with proposed language for your ordinance.

If you need examples of language for a pet sales ordinance, Best Friends has links to all of the [retail pet sales ordinances](#) that have been enacted throughout North America. We also have a model [no-kill resolution](#) that is concise and positive (located under "Example language for a no-kill resolution"). Use these as a starting point and customize as necessary. We can also help you draft issue-specific language based on your community's particular needs.

For the face-to-face meeting, have your data on hand and be prepared to answer questions. Leave the official with a fact sheet or a one-page summary, as well as your contact information. Be sure to thank the official for his or her time and then follow up a few days later.

Introduce the topic at a public council meeting

The second option is to introduce the proposed ordinance yourself at a public council meeting. You can give a brief presentation during the public comment period of the meeting (and perhaps a longer presentation if you make arrangements with the city clerk in advance).

Generally, the council will not discuss the issue until a future meeting, since open meeting laws dictate that all discussion items must be on the agenda that is posted for the public in advance (usually three days before the meeting). So, keep in mind that whether it's you or a council member who introduces the request for an ordinance, the council will not consider it at that first meeting. The topic will need to be put on the agenda for discussion at a future meeting. Don't be discouraged, though; your initial presentation will get the ball rolling.



4. RALLY SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY

"Community" should encompass residents, local business owners and professionals. When you consider who will support your proposal, think beyond the obvious animal welfare contingency, since anyone who is in support of your issue — especially if it's a broad cross-section of the community — can be of enormous value to your cause.

You will also want to contact members of the animal welfare community, such as shelter workers and volunteers, animal rescue groups, animal control officers, reputable breeders and veterinarians. Ask those individuals to contact the city council, sign letters and attend council meetings in support of your proposal. Rally your support early so you're not scrambling for reinforcement later.

You may also want to create a paper or online petition (see [Chapter 4](#)) to start mobilizing volunteers and support for a possible ordinance. (Try to get signatures only from people who live or work in the community.) This can also be done before your ordinance is officially proposed.

CHAPTER 3 [CONTINUED]



SOCIAL MEDIA IS A POWERFUL OUTREACH TOOL

When it comes to grassroots advocacy, social media is a powerful tool. You can quickly generate awareness and support with posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, blogs and other platforms. Many elected officials have public Facebook pages and Twitter accounts, so take advantage of the opportunity to communicate directly with them through those channels. See [Chapter 8](#) for information on how to use digital tools to support your work.

In addition, you can set up a Facebook group to share updates and/or an event page to encourage public meeting attendance. These are good places to link to a petition, provide contact information for council members or post a sample letter for supporters to send to council members.

Prewritten letters to the council can make it easy and convenient for people to communicate their support; the letters should include each supporter's name, address and signature. Make copies of all letters before submitting them to the council.

5. SPREAD THE WORD

Local media outlets will likely be interested in what you're proposing for the community. Here are some ideas for attracting media coverage to educate the community and garner support:

- Send letters or emails outlining your proposed ordinance to the editors of local newspapers, TV stations, radio stations and websites.
- Provide relevant background material about the issue ahead of time to any media representative who contacts you for an interview.
- Prepare a simple set of talking points for yourself. If a number of people are involved in your efforts, select one person as the media spokesperson and make sure that person is prepared to speak accurately and concisely about the issue. Ideally, your spokesperson should be a member of the community.
- When you meet with the media, consider bringing along a carefully selected ambassador dog or cat. Ambassador animals should be well-behaved and relaxed in hectic, unfamiliar public environments. They should also be clean, well-groomed and appear as friendly and approachable as possible. For dogs, this means no choke chains, chain leashes, prong collars or other aversive-training equipment.

6. ATTEND LOCAL GOVERNMENT MEETINGS

It's a good idea to attend local government meetings while you're waiting for your ordinance to be introduced, so you can see how the meetings are run and how the process works. You can also get a sense of the council members' personalities. It will help you feel more comfortable when it's time for you to testify in support of your ordinance. Once you're familiar with the format of the meetings, it's time to prepare for introducing your ordinance.

Before the meeting in which your proposal will come before the council, submit an information packet to each council member, as well as the mayor (if he or she is not a member of the council) and the city clerk. Keep at least one copy for yourself. Ask the city clerk how many copies need to be submitted and how far in advance of the meeting they need to be sent. You'll want council members to have time to review the information. Be sure to read [Chapter 9](#), which gives pointers for working with the media to support your efforts.

CHAPTER 3 [CONTINUED]



What to include in the information packets:

- A cover letter that briefly yet clearly explains the issue
- Your research materials
- A list of cities or counties that have passed similar ordinances, and a few sample ordinances that are comparable to what you are trying to achieve
- General informational materials about the issue (the [Best Friends advocacy page](#) has helpful resources)
- Your business card or contact information

What to bring to the meeting:

- A copy (or several copies, if you can) of the packet you sent to each council member
- Sample ordinances for the city attorney or city administrator
- Your petition signatures and/or copies of support letters
- A PowerPoint presentation, if possible
- Community support (subject matter experts and fellow constituents)

What to do and say at the meeting

Once you've introduced the ordinance, the public will be given a chance to comment on it. Each person who wishes to address the council will fill out a speaker card, and speakers are usually given 3-5 minutes each to speak. If possible, try to meet with public commenters in advance so that you know what they plan to say about the proposal. Organize them in the order of how you want the information presented; turn in your speaker cards in that order and plan for each person who comments to cover a different point.

When addressing the council, each speaker should state his/her name and whether he or she is a resident and/or business owner in the community (and if so, for how long). The council will want to hear from both residents and business owners who may be affected by the ordinance.

All speakers should have their remarks written out in advance. Public speaking can be scary for some people, so prepared notes bolster confidence and make it easier for speakers to avoid rambling or repetition. They also help ensure that every important point is covered within the time limit, and make it easier for speakers to edit their remarks on the fly if the council decides to shorten the speaker time at the meeting (which they often do if a lot of speaker cards are turned in). It's always a good idea to practice beforehand.

It isn't necessary to use the entire allotted public comment time (the council will be grateful if you don't), especially if you're just repeating what has already been said. If that's the case, each speaker should just state his or her name, and that he/she is a resident who supports the ordinance.

TIP: THE COUNCIL WILL WANT TO HEAR FROM BOTH RESIDENTS AND BUSINESS OWNERS WHO MAY BE AFFECTED BY THE ORDINANCE

CHAPTER 3 [CONTINUED]

If possible, create a PowerPoint presentation containing relevant facts and photos. This requires a bit more organization and practice, but PowerPoint is a very powerful tool since it gives the council visuals to accompany your remarks.

Tips for effective testimony:

- **DO** dress and conduct yourself appropriately. Be professional and businesslike in your appearance and your demeanor.
- **DO** try to be concise and on point. Avoid repeating what has already been said by other speakers.
- **DO** be patient, and be prepared to compromise. You may not get exactly what you set out to achieve.
- **DO** follow up to thank the council members who voted in support of your ordinance and encourage others to do the same.
- **DON'T** focus too much on animal cruelty. Not all elected officials are animal lovers, so try to tailor your remarks to their interests as legislators and address any concerns they might have.
- **DON'T** target any individual, group or business. Keep your focus on the general benefits that your ordinance will provide for the community.
- **DON'T** be emotional, combative or disrespectful. Even if others say things you find offensive or insulting, you will be much more effective if you remain polite and calm throughout the process.

Ordinance approval process

If there is a council motion to consider an ordinance, it usually starts with a direction to the city or county manager, attorney or staff to come back with a report and a recommendation. Or the council may decide to create a working group to investigate the issue and follow up with a report.

Once the council approves the drafting of an ordinance, the city or county attorney usually writes it. It's easiest for them to use an ordinance already passed by another jurisdiction as a template. (That's why you include those in the council packets and why you should always bring extra copies to the meeting.)

Once the ordinance is written, it will either go before the full council for a vote or, if the city or county is large, the ordinance may first have to be approved by a committee. When the ordinance goes before the full council, there will be a first reading vote and a public hearing, usually followed by a second reading vote a few weeks later. The council may revise the ordinance during this process.

Once the final ordinance is approved by a majority vote, it will go into effect. Depending on the ordinance and the city's or county's process, it may be effective immediately or after a designated waiting period.

7. DON'T GIVE UP!

Don't be discouraged if your ordinance isn't enacted. Getting the issue out there is a big step forward and will make it easier to implement some form of positive change down the road. You always have the option to try again (perhaps with a different elected council). And everything you've done in the process will help lead your community toward a no-kill future.

Take some time to regroup, and then consider doing the following:

- Reflect on your efforts, to determine whether you may need to adjust your strategy.
- Reach out to the elected officials who voted against your ordinance, to find out why they were not in support.
- Intensify your outreach, including communications with officials.
- Keep going to city council meetings and speaking up. Double your efforts to encourage supporters to attend meetings with you and provide input.
- Support animal-friendly candidates in future elections and work to help them win. (If you represent a nonprofit organization, be sure to research any laws or restrictions around supporting political candidates.)
- Attend political fundraisers and talk about the issues that matter to you.
- Consider running for public office yourself.

And when you do succeed, be sure to thank your public officials and fellow advocates. Implementing lifesaving change for animals takes all of us working together, and the more we recognize and value one another's efforts, the more effective we will be.

EVERYTHING YOU DO HELPS LEAD YOUR COMMUNITY TO A NO-KILL FUTURE.



[see video here >](#)

CHAPTER 4

CREATING PETITIONS AND GATHERING SIGNATURES



Local agencies and elected officials need to know you care about saving the lives of homeless pets. And pets in your community need your voice to help make that happen. Having good old-fashioned face-to-face conversations with people in your community is the most effective way to build the support you need to save more lives.

Creating a hard-copy petition and collecting community members' signatures for it can develop awareness, increase community engagement and build a contact list of local supporters. After writing a petition, circulate it at a forum, while tabling or canvassing, and at other community events.

In addition, consider writing a separate, perhaps more detailed petition for like-minded organizations to sign to demonstrate coalition-style support.

Effective petitions are ones that are strategically created and distributed and that get a significant number of signatures. Timing signature-gathering to precede important decisions and votes is key, as is following up with local officials to keep the momentum going. So, start collecting signatures several weeks before you need them and make sure to be mindful of dates and follow-up accordingly. **An important note: Petitions are only effective when you are able to collect a significant number of signatures in advance of critical dates.**

Also, think about how you want to deliver your petition signatures. For example, you could use the opportunity for additional press coverage, and invite supporters and reporters to a city council meeting where you hand-deliver it.

Tips for successful petitions:

- Address the petition to the people who possess decision-making power related to your group's goals. For example, direct the petition to the city council or the mayor rather than the "town of X" or the "people of X."
- Make sure signatures are legible. You should also leave space on the petition for people to include their street address so elected officials can verify that they are local constituents.
- Ask people if they want to join your action team or be added to your campaign's contact list. If so, get their contact information (email address, phone number and mailing address) and follow up with them within a week.
- Always make copies of petitions or signature cards before delivering them so that you can follow up with people who signed and use them again in the future.

HAVING FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO BUILD SUPPORT.

CHAPTER 4 [CONTINUED]



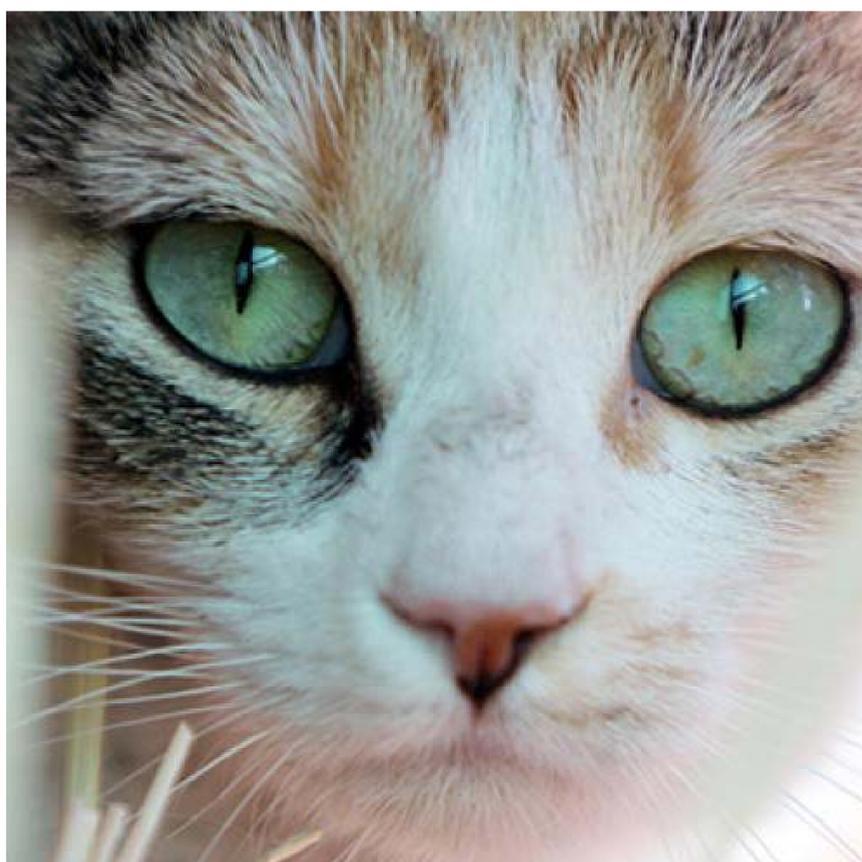
To collect signatures of support from people in your community:

- Print the petition. It should contain a fact sheet and space for signatures.
- Decide when and where you'll do outreach. Start with your neighbors, friends and family and then ask them to come along when you talk with others. Plan to visit community events, local coffee shops, grocery stores, libraries, churches, farmers' markets, college campuses or any areas with foot traffic.
- Grab a clipboard, pens and the petition, and hit the streets to collect signatures and comments.

It's best to keep your pitch very short and simple. Here are some useful talking points:

- Hundreds of cats and dogs in our community are at risk of being killed this year just because they don't have safe places to call home.
- There's been amazing lifesaving progress over the last several years, but too many animals are still being killed, and there's so much more that can and should be done.
- Our elected officials need to know their constituents want to live in a no-kill community, and our shelters need the public's support to get there.
- We have the opportunity to be a part of the solution and help our community's shelters get the resources they need to save every pet who can be saved.

Finally, take photos of your outreach efforts to share on social media and send them to us via action2025@bestfriends.org. Celebrating and sharing your success stories through our channels will help inspire other compassionate people around the country to follow your lead.





CHAPTER 5

HOSTING A 2025 ACTION TEAM MEETUP

The goal of any team meeting is to build community and strengthen connections among people with shared goals and interests. We are stronger when we act together and meetups are key components of creating and maintaining that unity.

BY HOSTING OR ATTENDING A MEETUP, YOU CAN:

- Connect with fellow community members who want to help dogs and cats
- Discuss the current lifesaving status of your community and determine what you can do to improve it
- Create a sense of excitement and inspire people to make a plan for the work ahead and even schedule a regular team meetup

HERE ARE THE STEPS FOR GETTING STARTED:

1. Contact Best Friends at action2025@bestfriends.org to let us know that you're starting a local campaign. We can provide information and guidance and help answer questions.
2. Prepare a sign-in sheet to collect attendees' contact information.
3. Print out a description of the campaign for each attendee. You can also hand out accompanying talking points and other resources as you see fit.
4. Prepare an agenda and choose a facilitator. As the host of the meeting, you may be the logical choice for facilitator, but if there is someone else that you think should do it, ask whether he or she would be willing to play that role. You should also designate someone to take notes and circulate them afterward.

Not sure how to facilitate a meeting? Get the [Facilitation 101 tool from the International Association of Facilitators](#).



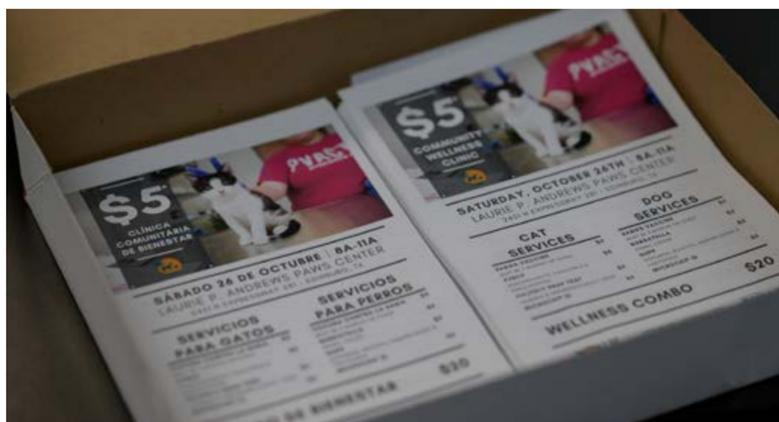
[see video here >](#)

CHOOSE A LOCATION AND TIME FOR YOUR MEETUP

You can host at your home or meetup at a café or other social place; libraries often have free meeting rooms.

Next, pick a time. After the workday ends is often ideal, especially if your team includes lots of diverse people with varying responsibilities and schedules. It's important to keep dinnertime in mind, so keep the meeting to about an hour in length.

CHAPTER 5 [CONTINUED]



WHAT TO DO AT YOUR FIRST MEETING

Before your first meeting, gather any materials you'll need. Print a sign-in sheet and bring supplies for brainstorming, such as pens, paper, Post-it notes or poster paper, and a laptop.

We suggest including the following items on the agenda of your first meeting:

- Make introductions.
- Explain the team purpose and campaign.
- Assess your community's needs.
- Brainstorm about allies.
- Develop an initial strategy.

These activities are discussed in more detail below. You may choose to do some of them at your second meeting, and keep your first meeting focused on the first two or three. How you structure your meetings depends on the people involved and your community's unique timeline. It may be better to keep the first meeting short, or it could be better to define your campaign more deeply right away. You decide!

Make introductions. Greet each attendee, make them feel welcome and thank them for making the time to show up. Once everyone has arrived, give them an opportunity to introduce themselves, share why they're there and offer any other relevant personal info (e.g., whether they are new to advocacy or have been involved in similar campaigns).

Explain the team purpose and campaign. Review the purpose of the meeting and explain why taking action for pets in your community is so important. Just remember to keep it short and sweet so you have time for brainstorming and planning.

Assess your community's needs. Use what you've learned from the [community lifesaving dashboard](#) and elsewhere to frame your community's needs. If you brought a laptop or tablet to the meeting, you may want to look at the dashboard information for your community as a group.

Discuss the animal advocacy "landscape" of your city or town. Here are some things to talk about:

- Are residents educated on animal welfare issues?
- Have there been related campaigns in the past?
- Are there any strong, organized groups already working on these issues?
- How can this campaign build on what already exists?
- What messages will resonate with the people in your community?
- What is the voting body in your community and what is its structure? (It is likely the city council, but some municipalities have other processes for voting on legislation, such as a town meeting or board.)
- How many votes do you need for your proposal to become law?
- What are the names and political affiliations of the members of the local legislative body?
- Based on what you know about them, who might you expect to support your reforms? Who might oppose them? Who are the likely swing votes?
- If the members represent specific wards or districts, does your action team include people from each ward?

You may not know the answers to all these questions at this point, but write down what you do know and make a team plan to find answers to the remaining questions.

GREET EACH ATTENDEE, MAKE THEM FEEL WELCOME AND THANK THEM FOR MAKING THE TIME TO SHOW UP.

CHAPTER 5 [CONTINUED]

Brainstorm about allies. Before a local government body will consider your reforms, you'll need to build a strong, diverse coalition representing as many different interests as possible. To get started, spend some time brainstorming about potential allies in your community. **Include your local shelters as a starting point.**

Here's an easy brainstorming activity:

- Give your group three different colors of Post-it notes. Then take a large sheet of poster paper and divide it into quadrants.
- Ask the group to write on the sticky notes the names of organizations (one color), individuals (another color) and institutions (the third color) related to your campaign. This will help participants brainstorm about potential outreach targets.
- Label the lines on your poster paper with an x-axis (horizontal) and a y-axis (vertical).
- The horizontal axis represents the degree of solidarity a person or group might have with your campaign — in other words, how much they agree with you and support your cause.
- The vertical axis represents the relative power of a person or group — how much sway or influence they have and how much they can help or hurt your cause.
- Based on those criteria, have participants place their sticky notes along the two axes. When everyone is done, you'll have your allies on the right side of the paper, your opponents on the left, and those who are neutral or uncertain in the middle.
- Your most powerful allies will be on the sticky notes in the upper right quadrant. Those are the individuals and groups you want to contact first. Then you can work your way down toward less likely or less powerful allies.



Develop an initial strategy. You can consider campaign strategy at your first meeting, or you can wait until your team includes a few more people. Either way, you should start to do this as quickly as you're able because it will help focus all of your efforts going forward.

The Midwest Academy for Activists defines a strategy as “a method of gaining enough power to make a government or corporate official do something in the public's interest that [they do] not otherwise wish to do.” A strategy is a means of building power in order to persuade a specific decision-making body to take a particular action. This definition, along with the [Midwest Academy's Strategy Chart](#), provides a good starting point for developing a strategy that will be successful in your community.

As you fill in your chart, use the information you collected while brainstorming about allies and assessing your community to start developing a strategy for your campaign. Completing the chart will help you go into further detail and think through the steps you will need to take.

At your next team meeting, take a few minutes to talk about what went well and what was most useful from the previous meeting. Take notes and refer to them when planning future meetings. This step is crucial for ongoing success and momentum.

Midwest Academy Strategy Chart

After choosing your issue, fill in this chart as a guide to developing strategy. Be specific. List all the possibilities.

Goals	Organizational Considerations	Constituents, Allies, and Opponents	Targets	Tactics
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. List the long-term objectives of your campaign. 2. State the intermediate goals for this issue campaign. What constitutes victory? <p><i>How will the campaign</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Win concrete improvement in people's lives? • Give people a sense of their own power? • Alter the relations of power? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. What short-term or partial victories can you win as steps toward your long-term goal? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. List the resources that your organization brings to the campaign. Include money, number of staff, facilities, reputation, canvass, etc. <p>What is the budget, including in-kind contributions, for this campaign?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. List the specific ways in which you want your organization to be strengthened by this campaign. Fill in numbers for each: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand leadership group • Increase experience of existing leadership • Build membership base • Expand into new constituencies • Raise more money 3. List internal problems that have to be considered if the campaign is to succeed. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who cares about this issue enough to join in or help the organization? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whose problem is it? • What do they gain if they win? • What risks are they taking? • What power do they have over the target? • Into what groups are they organized? 2. Who are your opponents? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will your victory cost them? • What will they do/spend to oppose you? • How strong are they? • How are they organized? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Primary Targets <p>A target is always a person. It is never an institution or elected body.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who has the power to give you what you want? • What power do you have over them? 2. Secondary Targets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who has power over the people with the power to give you what you want? • What power do you have over them? 	<p>For each target, list the tactics that each constituent group can best use to make its power felt.</p> <p>Tactics must be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In context. • Flexible and creative. • Directed at a specific target. • Make sense to the membership. • Be backed up by a specific form of power. <p>Tactics include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media events • Actions for information and demands • Public hearings • Strikes • Voter registration and voter education • Lawsuits • Accountability sessions • Elections • Negotiations



CHAPTER 6

TABLING AND CANVASSING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Tabling

Setting up a table and disseminating information at events organized by other groups is a good way to spread the word about your campaign, meet and talk to community members, get signatures for a petition and add names to your contact list. And as always, think outside the box so that you're reaching a broad audience and not limiting your options.

A few tips for tabling:

- You'll want to set up your table in locations with heavy foot traffic and a diverse audience, such as farmers' markets, community fairs and busy shopping areas. Try tabling in neighborhoods you haven't reached out to yet or at events hosted by groups that you think would make strong members of your coalition.
- Be sure to bring or have access to a table and chairs. Distribute educational materials about the campaign and ask attendees to fill out a sign-up sheet and sign any petitions or letters to local government officials that you have in progress.
- Be friendly and proactive. Don't wait for people to approach you or ask you questions. Greet people as they walk by and try to engage them. If they happen to be wearing a cool cat T-shirt or have a dog with them, even better!
- Target community residents by tabling at places like a local recycling center on Saturdays. Since the only people who go to the recycling center are city residents, this is an easy way to reach a lot of people who actually live in the city. Bring information about your campaign and talk to residents about upcoming events and volunteer opportunities.

Canvassing

Canvassing is another great way to engage proactively with your community and get critical face-to-face time with people. Many groups go door-to-door, telling residents about the campaign and asking them to sign a petition, come to an event, check out a website or write a letter.

A few tips for canvassing:

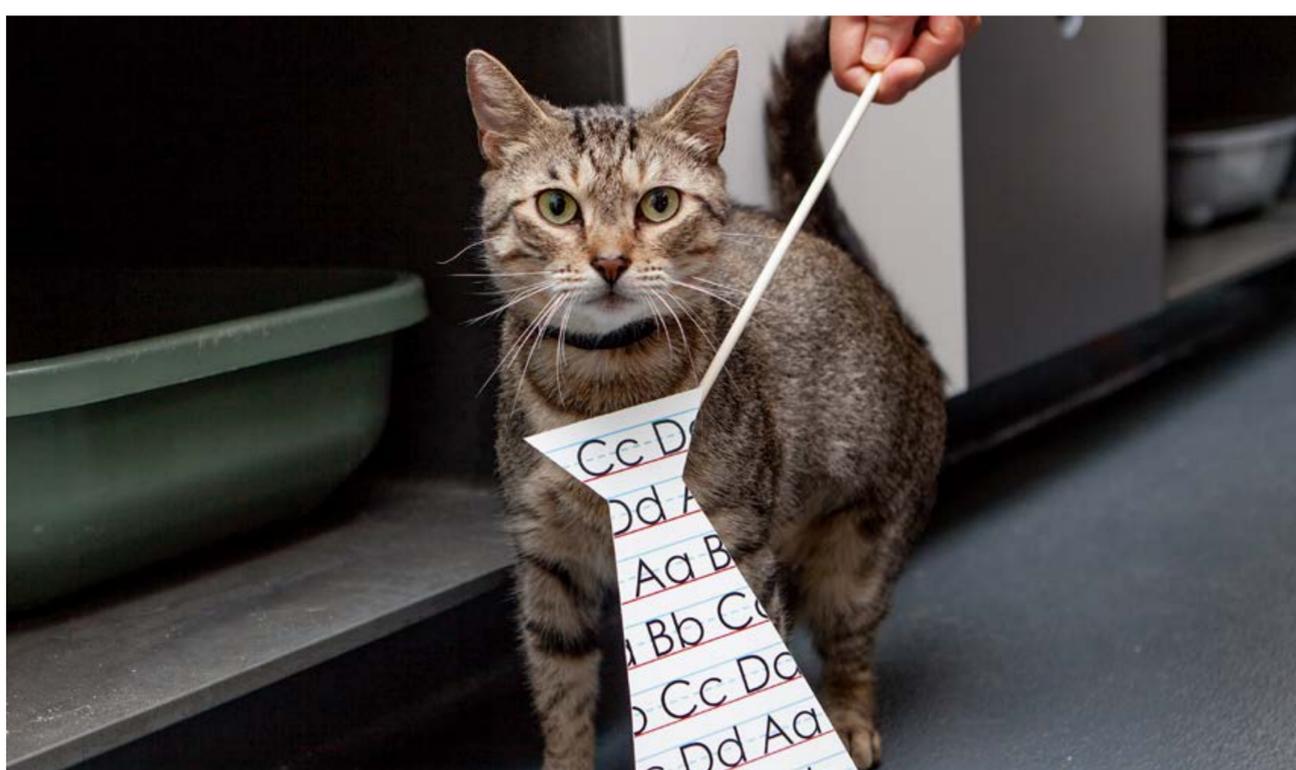
- Recruit volunteers from your team to help canvass. For people who haven't canvassed before, give them some training on what to say, what to bring and how to respond to questions. We recommend writing some basic talking points ahead of time and making sure your canvassing team is comfortable and familiar with them.
- Always go in pairs or groups and make sure the larger group knows which neighborhoods and streets each pair or group will visit. Also, be sensitive to the fact that you are coming to someone's home, so treat people respectfully and be gracious if they prefer not to speak with you.
- When interacting with people you don't know, use common sense. If someone makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, politely say goodbye and leave immediately.
- Choose a time when people are likely to be home, but when your visit won't be disruptive (i.e., Saturday afternoon is probably better than dinnertime on Wednesday). Bring educational materials with contact info printed on them and be prepared to answer questions.
- Document your canvassing activity. Ask volunteers to record how many houses or apartments they went to and how many people they spoke to.

After canvassing or tabling, always take time to debrief. Talk about what worked and what didn't. This will help you plan better for future efforts and make your group more efficient and effective.



CHAPTER 7

ENGAGING WITH LOCAL SCHOOLS



Engaging young people in animal-related issues is how we ensure a compassionate, humane world for future generations. When you involve kids in your advocacy work, it's also an opportunity to reach a bigger audience through the action your students take. From collecting donations and running lemonade stands to help animals at their local shelter to talking to their classmates and neighbors about homeless dogs and cats, kids can be an advocacy powerhouse.

Of course, be sure to always go through the proper channels when reaching out to schools or organizations that involve children. Contact the school's administrative office first or someone you know who works at the school who can serve as a point person for advocacy efforts there.

Similar to the research you've already conducted related to your community's lifesaving needs and your local allies, be sure to first familiarize yourself with any school or group you're planning to contact and discuss how and what you're going to present to the students. Remember to always be respectful of whoever you engage with throughout your campaign efforts.

Here are some initial ideas for involving schools and local youth groups in your campaign:

- Identify clubs and student council groups within the school that could help organize other students.
- Offer students a variety of fun, feel-good ways to get involved, such as creating adoption posters for pets at the shelter, making toys for cats and dogs from recycled material, and writing stories about their own pets, which can be used as part of a media campaign.
- Contact local shelters and other animal welfare groups about opportunities (and any related age restrictions) for young people to volunteer on behalf of the animals. Young children may not be old enough for some volunteer activities (e.g., walking dogs), but there are often other ways that they can help. For example, they could create "Adopt me" bandannas or stuff Kongs with peanut butter for dog treats.
- For older students in middle or high school, offer them the tools and support to create their own 2025 Action Team. High school students are perfectly positioned to help spread the word about important issues, events and petitions on social media and help with community outreach and engagement. And don't forget that high school students are always looking for fun, creative activities to add to their résumés for new jobs and applications for college.



CHAPTER 8

USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO SUPPORT YOUR ADVOCACY EFFORTS



“YOU CATCH MORE FLIES WITH HONEY THAN WITH VINEGAR.”

Social media is great for networking with other animal advocates, but it’s also an important public outreach tool. **Effective messaging can inform, educate and inspire**, increasing your team’s success. Ineffective messaging, on the other hand, can turn people off, limiting or even crippling your advocacy efforts and jeopardizing the welfare of the pets who are counting on you.

When you transition from using social media for personal purposes to advocacy-related work, it’s critical to use those platforms responsibly and avoid common mistakes that could hurt your cause. Below are a few tips for getting the most out of your social media efforts.

BE INCLUSIVE AND THOUGHTFUL

The old adage “You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar” is popular for a reason. People want to be involved with something they can feel good about, feel proud of and share with others. This is especially true for people who haven’t been involved in animal welfare and who are new to the idea of saving homeless pets.

We need to lead by example. **Show, don’t tell. Lead, don’t lecture.** Demonstrate for people how important pets are in our lives and why caring about homeless pets is so critical. Typically, the sad, disturbing or urgent posts that you see on social media are shared by people who are already willing to help. But they’re rarely, if ever, shared by the new audience we need to reach. Preaching to the choir might make us feel good momentarily, but it doesn’t help our long-term goal of saving more pets.

For example, “Adopt, don’t shop” is a beloved expression among many of us already involved in animal welfare, and it makes for a catchy hashtag. But consider how that expression might affect someone who has purchased a pet in the past. We want everyone to feel welcome and included in our work because that’s how we recruit more people to our cause and get more people to choose adoption. So, always be mindful of how you’re framing your campaign and how it might be received based on the audience.

CHAPTER 8 [CONTINUED]

KEEP IT POSITIVE, ALWAYS

People want to feel happy, not sad. Sad or disturbing photos of sick, injured and neglected pets (while perhaps necessary in certain contexts) generally do more harm than good on social media. Many people out there are unwilling to get involved with animal welfare or even visit shelters simply because everything they see and hear about homeless pets is negative and depressing.

To be effective advocates, it's our job to show folks something new and change their minds. You can still communicate urgency without being negative or using sad or upsetting messages and imagery to do it. Remember, much of our work is about reaching a new, broader audience, not the one that is already liking and sharing those social media posts you see every day.

DON'T PERPETUATE STIGMAS

On that same note, sad or negative imagery has unintended consequences that can lead to fewer animals being saved. Many people have yet to adopt a pet from a shelter because they think that animals in shelters are "damaged goods." And can you blame them? If all they see are photos, videos and messages with sad, upsetting pictures of abused pets, what else could they possibly think? We need to change that misperception.

When promoting a specific pet in need, for example, focus on the pet's personality rather than her circumstances. You want people to think about the future and consider who that pet could be as a member of their family, not who that pet was in the past.

DON'T BASH SHELTERS

The average municipal animal shelter is overcrowded and underfunded, and these shelters are often stressful places for staff to work. Attacking shelters or pointing fingers won't help anybody, especially the pets you're trying to save.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TWITTER

While often intimidating to non-users, Twitter is the preferred platform for connecting and engaging with most politicians, such as your state senator or representative. In fact, a survey done by the Congressional Management Foundation showed that 80% of "hill staffers" said that 30 posts on social media was enough to get their office's attention. You'll probably have 30 people or more on your team by the time you read this. So, get tweeting!

With that said, remember who you're communicating with and conduct yourself accordingly. **Stay on-topic and be respectful.** Many politicians also have public pages on Facebook that you can post to as well, but Twitter gives you the most direct access because you don't have to be 'friends' with a person to engage with them. And if your team has a great hashtag, make sure to always use it.

POST WITH PURPOSE

Respect the rules of online forums (e.g., individual Facebook Groups or subreddits) and refrain from counterproductive cross-posting. You should only post about adoptable pets, fundraisers and events in forums where those types of posts are explicitly permitted. Otherwise, you risk being muted or removed from the forum. In addition, people will be more responsive to your message and more likely to help if your posts are on-topic and targeted to relevant audiences (e.g., promote a Detroit-based adoption event on Detroit-related pages).

HAVE FUN

Yes, saving lives is serious business. But that doesn't mean we can't have a good time while doing it! The best way to recruit new volunteers, foster caregivers and action team members is to have fun yourself and make it fun for others. Throw an adoption party for a dog who's been in the shelter a long time, make a music video about community cats, share pictures of you and your friends celebrating after a day of collecting petition signatures. Think about all the fun, creative stuff you see online every day and are more likely to share because it's thoughtful, engaging and positive.

PREACHING TO THE CHOIR MIGHT MAKE US FEEL GOOD MOMENTARILY, BUT IT DOESN'T HELP OUR LONG-TERM GOAL OF SAVING MORE PETS.



CHAPTER 9

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

While advocacy efforts don't rely quite as heavily on traditional media (i.e., radio, television and newspapers) as they did a decade or two ago, they're still important to your campaign.

Here are some media relations fundamentals to keep in mind:

- Your ideal message must be communicated in one short, simple, clear sentence. Messages that are too complex are difficult for the public to incorporate and too much of a hassle for most reporters to get right. Help them help you!
- Be prepared with relevant statistics and examples to support your message, but use them strategically. Inform, but don't overwhelm.
- Less is more in interviews. Aim for no more than three main talking points in shorter segments and no more than five in longer ones. More than that and you're likely to dilute your message and confuse the reporter.
- Give reporters a story they haven't heard before. And make it one they really want to tell.
- Avoid using animal welfare lingo, but if you do, explain what you mean. For example, don't toss out the acronym "TNR" without explaining what it means (trap-neuter-return). Think about terms that might need to be translated to more public-friendly language. For example, instead of "shelter intake," say "shelter admissions."
- Be sure to maintain control of the interview and guide the conversation in the direction that you want it to go.
- Practice before any interview, if you have time. Use index cards and practice your talking points with people you know who aren't familiar with animal welfare and your advocacy team. This will ensure that the average listener will understand what you're saying.
- Anticipate questions you might be asked, especially the more challenging ones.
- Try to sound friendly and conversational while still maintaining professionalism and focus.
- Speak in simple, complete sentences. For TV or radio interviews, repeat the question as part of the answer.
- Occasionally, reporters will leave a long pause after you finish speaking to get you to say more. Use the time if you want to, but don't feel compelled to fill dead air space. Saying too much can lead you off-topic and muddle your message or inspire a question you're not prepared to answer.
- Dress appropriately for in-person interviews. Avoid anything flashy or distracting. Your message should be the focus, not your ensemble.
- During on-camera interviews, look at the interviewer (rather than the camera) to help ease any anxiety and make you appear more personable.
- Be mindful of your body language. Avoid fiddling with your hair, clothing or hands. Similarly, don't involve an animal in an on-camera interview unless you're already practiced with that animal and can ensure that your four-legged friend won't distract you (or others) from the primary message.
- Silence your phone before the interview and avoid looking at your phone until after you've excused yourself. People want to know that you value their time.

CHAPTER 9 [CONTINUED]



In an interview, it's OK to not know the answer to every question, especially when you're getting started. As long as you keep a few best practices in mind, you'll be ready for those moments when you don't have all the information.

Here are some tips:

- If you don't know the answer, don't panic or manufacture information. Let the interviewer know you'll get the information and follow up as soon as possible.
- It's OK to say "I don't know" or "I'm not sure."
- Always ask the interviewer to clarify or repeat a question you don't understand.
- If you're asked a question that would be better answered by another person, politely tell the reporter who that source of information is. If it's appropriate, you can offer to contact that person and get back to the reporter.
- If you're asked a question that requires you to speculate, simply say you don't want to speculate.
- Remember that nothing is ever truly "off the record." If you don't want people to hear it, don't say it.

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WE MEET PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE DOING THEIR OWN VERSION OF ANIMAL RESCUE — WHEN WE CONNECT WITH THEM, WE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO SAVE MORE LIVES.”

– Kenny Lamberti
Director of Grassroots Advocacy
Best Friends Animal Society

Questions about this toolkit: action2025@bestfriends.org
Questions about ordinances and legislation: legislative@bestfriends.org
Questions about puppy mill efforts: puppymillinitiatives@bestfriends.org

For general questions about Best Friends Animal Society, please email info@bestfriends.org.