

ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL TODAY

A publication of the National Animal Care and Control Association



Fall 2025

INNOVATIONS THROUGH ANIMAL CONTROL

*Insights from the Return
to Home Challenge and
Paws in the Field
Challenge for ACOs to
implement now.*

ADVANCING THE FIELD

*NACA Partners with
Pasadena Humane
Society to Launch a New
Program.*

PAWS FOR A CHANGE

*Legislative updates
from around the
country.*

NEW CERTIFICATION COMING SOON

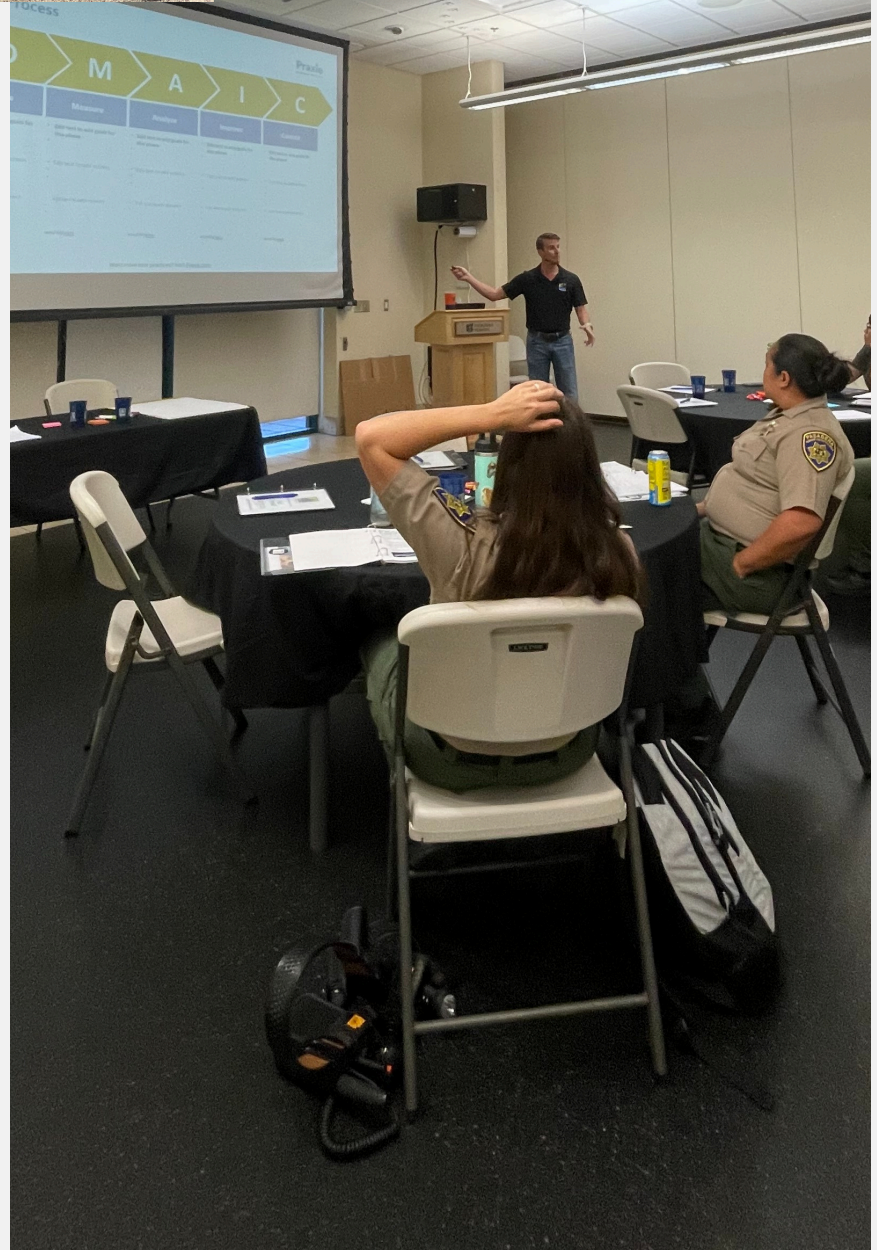
SHELTERS SAFETM

THE MAGAZINE FOR TODAY'S ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL PROFESSIONALS, HIGHLIGHTING THE PEOPLE, PRACTICES, AND PROGRESS THAT SHAPE OUR WORK.



Fall 2025

The National Animal Care & Control Association (NACA) is the nation's leading professional organization for animal care and control. With a membership of thousands of officers, shelter professionals, and agencies across the U.S., NACA sets the standards for training, education, and best practices in the field. Through certification programs, advocacy, and national partnerships, NACA works to elevate professionalism, improve community engagement, and ensure the safety and well-being of both animals and people.



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A man in a police uniform, seen from the side, is holding a small, light-colored puppy. The man has a beard and is looking down at the puppy. The puppy is looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with trees and a car.

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Stay connected with NACA's Communications Committee for the latest updates, resources, and networking opportunities!

TORI FUGATE

Communications Director
Shelter Animals Count



FROM THE CEO

As we welcome the vibrant colors of fall, I'm reminded not only of the resilience of nature, but of the resilience and heart within our animal care and control community. This season brings with it both challenges and joys, and through it all, we are reminded that the most powerful thing we have is each other.

Our world often feels deeply divided, and those divisions can spill into our work. But as a community, we have the opportunity—and the responsibility—to rise above. We can choose compassion over criticism, understanding over judgment, and unity over division. When we lean on one another instead of turning on one another, we become stronger, more creative, and more capable of facing the struggles before us.

Yes, the work is hard. Shelters are stretched, resources are thin, and the needs can feel overwhelming. But alongside the struggles, we also share moments of joy—animals reunited, families strengthened, lives saved. These moments are brighter because they are shared together.

This fall, let's commit not only to the animals and communities we serve, but to one another. Let's extend grace, patience, and empathy, knowing that each of us carries unseen burdens and untold stories. Together, we can create a culture of support that allows us to rise above division and move forward with courage, compassion, and hope.

Thank you for being part of this work, and for being part of each other's strength.

Jerrica Owen

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER





ShelterSafe: Foundations in Animal Care

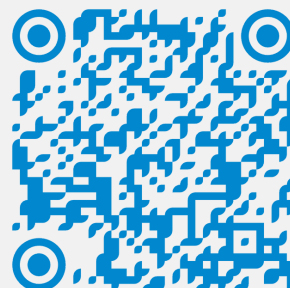
A NATIONAL CERTIFICATION BY NACA

Starting a new role in animal sheltering can feel overwhelming — but the right training makes all the difference. ShelterSafe: Foundations in Animal Care was designed to complement staff onboarding or provide immediate, accessible training for new team members who need to get up to speed quickly.

Built around the Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare, this course covers the essentials of sheltering: health, behavior, enrichment, daily operations, and the emotional resilience required in this demanding field. Participants gain both the knowledge and confidence to provide safe, humane care from day one.

Whether you're caring for animals directly or supporting behind the scenes, ShelterSafe emphasizes how even the smallest actions — offering enrichment, handling with care, or ensuring a clean environment — lead to better outcomes for both pets and people. At its core, this course reinforces the truth that every animal deserves safety, compassion, and dignity.

ShelterSafe: Foundations in Animal Care isn't just for new staff — it's a valuable tool for managers too. By incorporating this course into onboarding, leaders can ensure consistency in training, set clear expectations, and free up time for hands-on mentoring. Managers gain confidence knowing their team members are grounded in best practices, which helps reduce turnover, improve animal care, and create a stronger, more resilient shelter culture.





Online NACA Training

At NACA, training is more than a course—it's a commitment to elevating the profession of animal care and control. From ACO I-III certifications that guide officers from the field to leadership, to specialized programs like Dispatch Essentials and ShelterSafe, NACA equips professionals with the knowledge and skills to serve their communities with compassion, confidence, and excellence.

ACO I: Foundations of Animal Control

- Introductory certification for new officers.
- Covers laws, safety, animal handling, and community relations.
- Builds confidence for those starting their careers.

ACO II: Advanced Animal Control Practices

- Expands on investigations, enforcement, and humane handling.
- Focus on case documentation, courtroom preparation, and officer safety.
- Designed for officers with prior training or experience.

ACO III: Leadership & Professional Development

- Highest level of ACO certification.
- Emphasizes supervision, policy, ethics, and advanced field operations and a 3 day hands on deep dive into forensics.

Dispatch Essentials

- Specialized training for call-takers and dispatch staff.
- Teaches communication, prioritization, and officer support.
- Ensures dispatchers are equipped to handle emergency and routine calls.

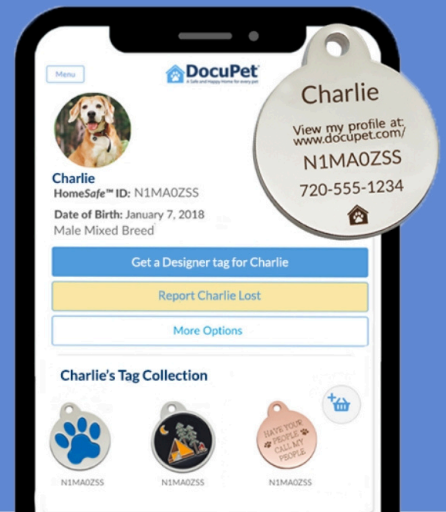
ShelterSafe

- Training focused on shelter operations and animal care.
- Covers intake, housing, enrichment, disease prevention, and safety.
- Promotes high standards of care and staff preparedness in shelter settings.

In-Person Training is Back!

We know online learning isn't for everyone — and that's why NACA is bringing back in-person training starting in 2026! From National ACO Certifications (I-III) to Mental Health First Aid and our hands-on Field Forward Workshops, these sessions offer practical skills, peer connection, and the chance to learn directly from industry experts. Stay tuned for dates and locations as we expand opportunities for officers and shelter staff nationwide.

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What we offer

North America's only complete licensing solution, DocuPet provides services and software to streamline and modernize pet licensing programs. Proudly serving over 200 partners across North America, DocuPet onboards a new partner each week, helping communities across the continent increase their license sales and provide crucial funding for local animal welfare programs and initiatives.



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For pet owners

A simple experience for licensing a pet throughout their life while providing added value through products and services complimentary to pet ownership.



For the community

A comprehensive program designed to keep local pets safe while providing local animal welfare programs with the funds and resources they need through an improved pet licensing program.

Keep animals out of the shelter with HomeSafe®

DocuPet is mission driven to help lost pets return home quickly, without any shelter intervention. The free 24/7 HomeSafe® lost pet service and linked tags further this mission by providing a proactive approach to the lost pet problem for pet owners and shelters alike. Thousands of pets have been reunited with their families *without* stepping a paw in the local shelter, thanks to this valuable service.

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”

—Dr. Gary Weitzman, President and CEO, San Diego Humane Society

Learn more at partnerships.docupet.com



Pasadena Pilot: Field Forward!

By NACA

NACA recently completed a groundbreaking two-day pilot program in Pasadena, California, as part of Field Forward – a program by NACA. The pilot was led by Lean Six Sigma Certified Board President Spencer Conover, Executive Director Jerrica Owen (also Lean Six Sigma certified), and Mike Wheeler, who completed the full two-day field services assessment.

This innovative model combined a comprehensive department assessment with an immersive process improvement workshop, and the results have us energized for what's ahead. What made this pilot truly progressive was the shift from traditional policy review to hands-on, officer-led problem solving. Over two days, Pasadena's animal control officers took the lead: examining their own processes, identifying strengths and challenges, and collaborating across roles to develop real solutions. This wasn't top-down training. Instead, it was a space for the team to think critically, share openly, and build a roadmap forward together.

From streamlining response protocols to improving internal communication, the workshop sparked meaningful conversations and collective action.

Paired with the department assessment, which included officer ride-alongs for a true on-the-ground perspective, we gained deep, real-world insight into the team's daily challenges and opportunities. Spending two days side-by-side with officers reinforced NACA's evolving culture: working directly with professionals in the field to create sustainable, effective change from the ground up.

The workshop itself was shaped in real time by insights gathered during the assessment. Together, we explored what's working, what's not, and what practical steps the team can take moving forward. The level of buy-in, the depth of discussion, and the energy in the room made one thing clear: meaningful change isn't just possible—it's already happening.

And this is only the beginning. We're excited to refine this Field Forward model and expand it to more agencies and officers across the country. Stay tuned!

For more information visit www.nacanet.org and click on our programs tab to learn more.

Helping Animal Control Officers Advocate for Better Buildings

SUBMITTED BY HANNAH SKIDMORE, SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER, DESIGN
LEARNED INC.



Struggling with Building Problems?

Are you working in an outdated animal control facility? Does your agency have a tight budget and limited staff? Is the building layout more of a hindrance than a help? If you said yes to any of these questions, you are not alone.

Across the country, animal control agencies are operating in buildings that are aging, inefficient, and poorly designed. HVAC systems are failing. Plumbing is outdated. Layouts are inefficient. Sound familiar? These issues directly impact the quality of care provided to animals and the safety and well-being of the staff. Animal care is complex! Animal control officers need a physical environment and building that supports the specialized demands of the work.



Do you feel overwhelmed or unsure about how to address your facility problems?

Are you unfamiliar with the building design and construction process? Most animal control professionals are not engineers or architects, and that is perfectly okay.

Understanding the basics of facility planning can help agencies make a stronger case to city and county decision-makers when advocating for improvements. Here are the common challenges that animal control facilities face, and the support available to animal control professionals.

While every animal control agency is different, most face a similar set of obstacles when it comes to their buildings. Here are the top five challenges that animal control facilities face.

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Partnering with animal care experts and building design engineers is invaluable for animal control officers.

1 - Aging Infrastructure

Many buildings were never designed for modern animal care. Think about the HVAC, plumbing, and electrical systems. They are often beyond their service life! This type of aging infrastructure can create an unsafe or unhealthy environment for both animals and staff.

2 - Inefficient Layouts

Let's face it. Most of our buildings have an inefficient layout because they were not originally designed with animal care in mind. These poorly planned spaces can make simple tasks - like animal intake, cleaning, or quarantine procedures unnecessarily difficult. Inefficient layouts increase staff workload and reduce the quality of care for the animals.

3 - Limited Budgets

Are you experiencing budget constraints? Animal control departments often operate with limited budgets and constrained funding. These limitations can make it difficult to simply maintain existing structures - let alone plan for necessary renovations!

Animal control departments often operate with limited budgets and constrained funding.

4 - Staffing Shortages

From hiring freezes to workforce reductions, staffing shortages bring a real impact to animal care agencies. Staff are often stretched thin - being held responsible for both animal care and building maintenance. And, lack of training is a completely different issue!

5 - Lack of Experience with Building Projects

How much experience do you have navigating public construction, procurement, and building design? A lack of specialized experience can be overwhelming! Most animal control officers have little experience managing or advocating for building projects, and that's a barrier to getting started.

While these challenges are real, they are not impossible for animal control officers and agencies to overcome.

Five Areas of Support for Animal Control Officers

Partnering with animal care experts and building design engineers is invaluable for animal control officers. They are more than specialized design professionals; they are advocates and allies for animal control agencies. They can help animal control officers, like you, take concrete steps toward better facilities.

1 - Navigating the Local Requirements Maze

Animal care facility designers are more than architects — they are advocates and allies. They help translate operational challenges into practical building solutions that meet public funding rules while improving health, safety, and community perception.

2 - Navigating Local Requirements

Public projects come with complex rules for design, bidding, and purchasing. Specialized facility designers know how to navigate these processes and explain why animal control facilities require unique standards like ventilation, drainage, and sound control.

3 - Meetings & Advocacy

These experts join you in meetings with planners, commissioners, and procurement staff, making the technical case for why animal control facilities must meet different standards. Their advocacy often opens doors to funding and support.

4 - Animal-Care-Specific Design

They specialize in systems that matter: proper ventilation, odor and noise control, drainage, moisture management, durable finishes, and efficient staff workflows. This expertise ensures long-lasting, effective facilities.

5 - Facility Assessments & Reports

Specialists can evaluate your current building, identify operational needs, recommend layouts, and provide cost estimates — giving you the foundation to request funding or launch an RFP with confidence.

Small Steps Can Make a Big Difference! You don't need to start with a multimillion-dollar renovation. Often, the smartest first move is a basic facility evaluation.

An evaluation can:

- Show decision-makers where money is lost through inefficiency
- Identify critical health and safety issues
- Demonstrate long-term savings from thoughtful design
- Align projects with taxpayer priorities
- These early steps prevent wasted spending on temporary fixes and ensure that future investments are strategic, effective, and tailored to your agency's needs.

Contributor Bio: Design Learned, Inc. is an engineering and design consulting firm specializing in animal care facilities. Founded in 1993, the firm has worked on a range of projects, including municipal shelters, veterinary hospitals, and animal boarding facilities. Their team includes engineers and designers with expertise in ventilation, noise control, drainage, and workflow planning for animal environments. Design Learned's role in this piece was to share professional observations and common challenges faced by animal control facilities; the company did not provide product endorsements or advertising content for this article.



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PAWS FOR A CHANGE

BY NACA

Federal/National

Animal Cruelty Crimes Section Act (H.R. 1477, 119th Congress) — This proposed bill (introduced Feb 2025) would establish a dedicated Animal Cruelty Crimes Section within the U.S. Department of Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division. Its goal is to improve federal coordination, prosecution capacity, and reporting on animal cruelty cases. (Source: Congress.gov)

Better CARE for Animals Act / CARE for Animals Act — Introduced to strengthen enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act, this bill would give the DOJ better access to AWA violator evidence, power to revoke licenses, and potentially remove mistreated animals from facilities. (Source: Humane World for Animals)

PACT Act enforcement task forces — The creation of federal task forces to enforce the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture (PACT) Act is ongoing in various jurisdictions, enhancing capacity to pursue federal cruelty charges (especially involving interstate commerce or "crush videos"). (Source: Dept. of Justice)

State & Local Level

Arizona Senate Bill 1033 & SB 1234 — SB 1033 would increase the required bonding for seized animals (on suspicion of cruelty) from \$25 per animal to \$500 per animal. SB 1234 expands the definitions of cruelty and neglect to include failure to prevent suffering, improper shelter, and other caretaker responsibilities. These bills have passed the Senate and are under consideration in the House. (Source: AKC)

Florida's Dexter's Law & Trooper's Law — Signed May 2025, Dexter's Law (effective July 1, 2025) and Trooper's Law (effective October 1, 2025) increase penalties for aggravated animal cruelty, require a public registry of convicted animal abusers, and criminalize abandonment of pets during declared disasters. (Source: Tallahassee News)

Massachusetts Retail Pet Sales Ban Bills (S.650, S.618) — Proposed legislation aims to ban the retail sale of dogs, cats, and rabbits in pet shops. Additional related bills (S.1206/H.1817) propose companion animal custody frameworks in divorce/split situations. (Source: ALDF)

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Questions?

Call or email CherylAnn Fernandes at (781) 281-5167 & cherylann.fernandes@petlink.net



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“ ACROSS THE COUNTRY, STATES ARE STRENGTHENING LAWS TO BETTER PROTECT ANIMALS — FROM CALIFORNIA’S OVERSIGHT OF PET SALES, TO ILLINOIS’ SHELTER TRANSPARENCY BILLS, TO FLORIDA’S DANGEROUS DOG REFORMS. THESE EFFORTS HIGHLIGHT A GROWING RECOGNITION THAT ANIMAL WELFARE IS A MATTER OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND COMMUNITY TRUST.

Florida “Pam Rock Act” (HB 593)

This bill revises dangerous dog provisions: requiring proper confinement, microchip + spay/neuter, liability insurance, signage, and penalties for removing microchips.

New Jersey Senate Bill 81

Allows placement of animals involved in cruelty cases into animal welfare organizations or shelters after 7 days, if not adjudicated.

California AB 506 – Contracts: sales of dogs and cats

This bill would regulate contracts for the sale of dogs and cats (e.g. pet shops, breeders).

New Jersey Senate Bill 81

Allows placement of animals involved in cruelty cases into animal welfare organizations or shelters after 7 days, if not adjudicated.





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How to Get Your Rooster(s) Adopted

SUBMITTED BY KELLY RUTKOWSKI, FOUNDER OF ADOPT A BIRD NETWORK

The popularity of backyard chickens coupled with the increased number of municipalities allowing residents to keep hens but restricting roosters has led to a massive animal welfare crisis for roosters across the United States. Animal shelters in these areas often find themselves overwhelmed with roosters. Most are found as strays or surrendered but others may come from hoarding cases or confiscated from cockfighting operations.

Since there isn't a strong market of people seeking a rooster to adopt, animal shelters have a difficult time finding homes for them. Many of these roosters can end up sitting in these shelters for months to YEARS. This predicament is the reason why I founded Adopt a Bird Network, a not-for-profit organization which helps the roosters in these animal shelters find good homes. Since 2017, I've helped find homes for thousands of roosters and have learned the art of marketing roosters. Here are several tips to help you get your roosters out of your shelter and into good homes.

1. Give Him a Name

A name makes a rooster feel like an individual, not just “livestock.” Choose cute, positive names — avoid food or fighting references. Titles like “Sir” or “Professor” can add charm.

2. Take Great Photos & Videos

Quality photos are essential for adoption listings. Social media videos of staff or volunteers interacting with the rooster dramatically increase interest. Fun props, enrichment toys, or bow ties help showcase personality.



The popularity of backyard chickens coupled with the increased number of municipalities allowing residents to keep hens but restricting roosters has led to a massive animal welfare crisis for roosters across the United States.

3. Share His Story

Details matter: how he came to the shelter, how he gets along with other birds, his health, quirks, and temperament. Unique traits and positive handling experiences boost adoption chances.

4. Note Size & Breed

Mention his size and, if possible, breed. Some breeds (like Silkies or Polish) are especially appealing to adopters.

5. Keep Flocks Together

If roosters arrive with hens or buddies, adopt them out as a group. Roosters can also thrive in “bachelor flocks” when no hens are present.



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6. Build a Foster Network

Fosters help free up shelter space and often lead to permanent adoptions within the foster's own network.

7. Screen Carefully

Always ask the right questions: experience, housing, predator protection, and veterinary care. Avoid giving roosters away for free — it puts them at risk.

With creativity, good marketing, and thoughtful screening, roosters can find safe and loving homes.

“

Bantam	< 1.5 kg
Small	2.5 kg - 1.5 kg
Medium	3 kg - 2.5 kg
Large	> 3.5 kg

”

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Protecting Animals Through Winter:

Tools That Help Welfare Organizations Do More With Less

SUBMITTED BY PATRICK PHARRIS, GLOBAL DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, FARM & YARD

For animal control, animal care, and animal welfare organizations, winter can be the toughest season of the year. The cold months stretch resources thin, create urgent needs for shelter and warmth, and make basic tasks like feeding and sanitation far more difficult. With staff and volunteers already pushed to their limits, these groups must rely on tools and equipment that are efficient, reliable, and long-lasting.

One of the greatest winter challenges is keeping animals safe from the **cold**. Dogs housed outdoors or in temporary facilities often lack proper insulation, exposing them to frostbite, illness, or even death. Insulated shelters that retain heat and raised kennels that keep animals off frozen ground give organizations a way to provide secure, climate-controlled protection. "These aren't luxuries; they're lifesaving essentials," said Dr. Jennifer Betz, DVM, Veterinary Medical Director and Board Member of "Dogs of Chernobyl"- Clean Futures Fund. "When temperatures plunge, especially in places like Ukraine where we conduct a great deal of life-saving activities, insulated kennels allow us to keep dogs safe and warm. Without them, our ability to provide adequate care would be severely diminished."

Cold weather increases animals' caloric needs, but much of that feed is wasted when it's placed on the ground, where it becomes wet, trampled, or contaminated. Elevated, adjustable-height feeders (designed for taller animals such as horses, alpacas, goats, and sheep) prevent this waste by keeping food off the ground, cleaner, and easier to access. For organizations that care for a variety of animals, being able to adjust a single feeder to different heights improves efficiency and significantly reduces waste.



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Every pound of feed saved represents real cost savings and ensures more nourishment reaches the animals that need it most. By cutting down on waste and streamlining daily routines, adjustable feeders provide a practical and economical solution for animal care operations, particularly for resource-conscious non-profits.

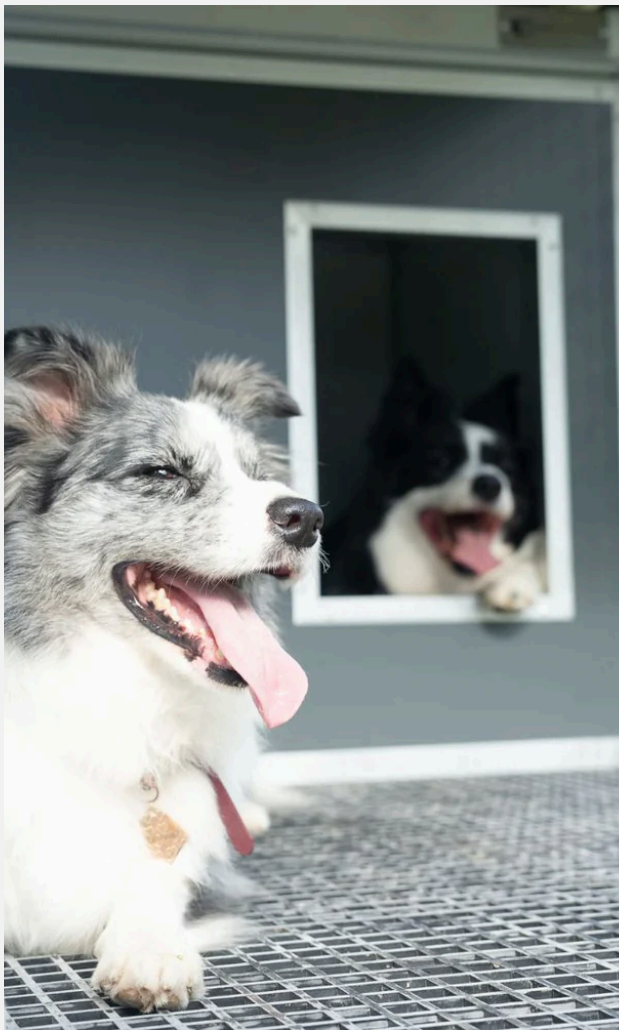
Maintaining clean and sanitary enclosures year-round is a constant challenge for animal care operations. Removing manure and debris by hand is labor-intensive and physically demanding, especially across large paddocks or enclosures. Tools designed to tow behind common utility vehicles transform hours of work into minutes, allowing limited staff and volunteers to dedicate more time to direct animal care. By streamlining cleanup, towable scoops improve efficiency and free up critical resources to support the overall health and well-being of animals.



For groups that raise poultry, predator protection is often heightened in winter, when food is scarce and predators grow bolder. Mobile coops with sturdy frames and flooring gives organizations the ability to move chickens to fresh ground while safeguarding them from coyotes, foxes, and raccoons at night. Weatherproof covers and nesting boxes make daily care easier and safer, even in freezing conditions, while mobility keeps land healthier and reduces the risks associated with overcrowding in a fixed space.

Beyond shelter, feeding, and sanitation, identification is critical year-round but especially urgent in winter when lost pets increase due to storms and displaced families. Dual systems, like combining permanent microchips with highly visible QR tags, help shelters and animal control agencies reunite animals with their owners quickly, preventing overcrowding and stress on facilities. This kind of technology also saves staff valuable time, as scanning a tag or chip means fewer lost animals end up languishing in shelters during the coldest months of the year.

Ultimately, the priority for animal welfare groups is simple: to do the most-good for the greatest number of animals, with the resources available. Durable, easy-to-maintain, and adaptable equipment helps these organizations extend their reach and improve outcomes for both companion and working animals.



Contributor Bio: Farm & Yard provides durable, cost-efficient solutions that help animal care organizations work smarter and safer. From insulated dog houses and raised kennels to mobile coops, adjustable feeders, sanitation tools, and identification kits, Farm & Yard designs products that address real-world challenges while supporting compassionate, effective animal care.



1 in 3 pets will go missing. Finding them can be easy.

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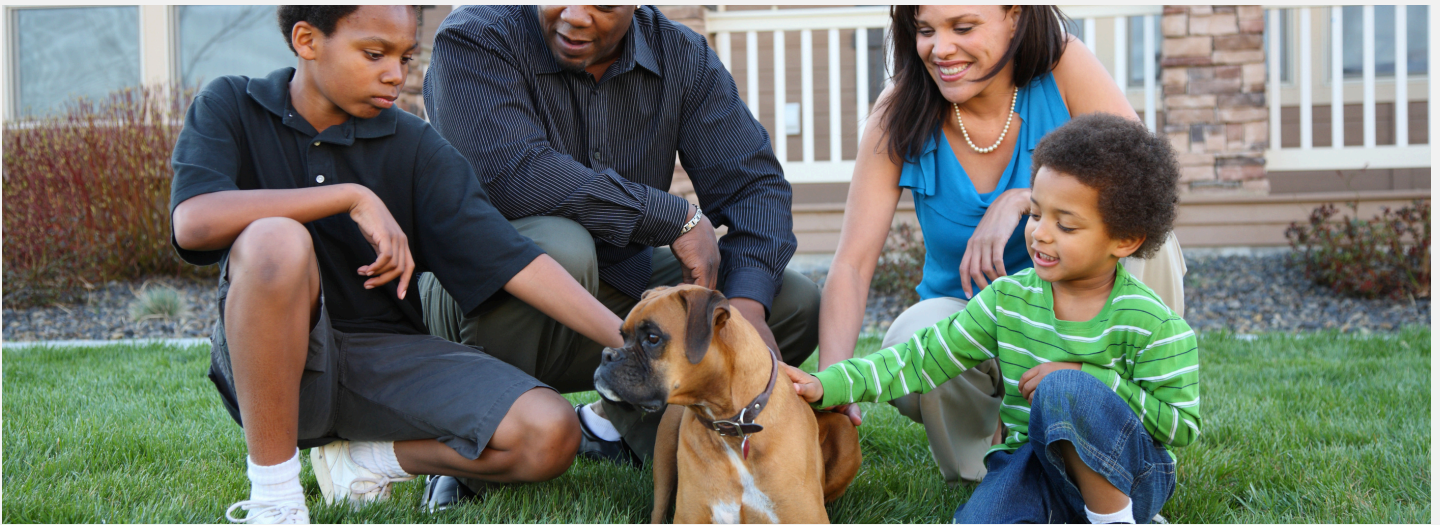
- ✓ With 200,000+ pets, Petco Love Lost is the largest national lost and found pet database.
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How to Help More Lost Pets Get Back Home and Increase Lifesaving

LESSONS FROM THE BEST FRIENDS RETURN TO HOME CHALLENGE AND PAWS IN THE FIELD CHALLENGE THAT ANIMAL SERVICES OFFICERS CAN START USING TODAY



SUBMITTED BY BEST FRIENDS ANIMAL SOCIETY

On May 27, 2025, Officer Logan Milks with Bryant Animal Control and Adoption Center in Arkansas responded to a report about a loose dog. The officer spotted the older, medium-sized black and white mixed breed dog — and, once the dog was leashed up, scanned him for a microchip.

A few calls later, Officer Milks was on the phone with the dog's owners — who hadn't even realized yet that their pup Kenobi had escaped from the yard.

Home was just a short distance away, and Kenobi was quickly returned.

"Before Officer Milks returned to the shelter that day, I had already received an email from Kenobi's appreciative family, thanking him for taking the time to bring Kenobi home safely," says Animal Control Director Tricia Powers.

Shelters are full of lost dogs, with many coming in as "strays." These pets are often owned — with people who love them, and who desperately want them back. Getting lost dogs back home preserves these families, helps prevent shelter overcrowding, builds good relationships within communities, and increases lifesaving.



Nearly 150 shelters piloted the Return to Home Challenge in September 2024, to try new strategies for returning dogs back home by providing resources, support, and funding.

City of Asheville Animal Services – photo by Asheville Humane Society

But what new strategies can shelters and animal services officers start to use, to help more lost pets in their communities get back to their homes?

Shelters and animal services officers recently tried something new to help answer that question, with nearly 250 organizations participating in two Best Friends Network challenges — with results that can help animal services officers and shelters reunite more lost pets with their families nationwide.

Here are the results — with actions you can take starting today.

Each of the participating shelters were asked to try two new operational procedures — like waiving or reducing reclaim fees by at least 50%; providing microchip scanners to at least 50% of animal services officers who interact with the public; and conducting in-field investigations to try to locate a lost pet's home.

The whole list of practices is on the Return to Home Challenge website — along with resources, materials, and other tools like these to help with implementation:

- Return-to-Home (Owner) Training Playbook
- Field-Return-to-Home (Owner) Training Playbook
- “Beyond the Scanner: Advanced Return-to-Home (Owner) in-Field Techniques” (video)



McKamey Animal Center

88% percent of the shelters that reported results told us they planned to continue the new practices implemented during the challenge

Participants tried out new ways to market and communicate these practices with their communities as well, to help spread the word about what actions people should take if they find or lose a pet, and how the shelters are getting more pets back to their families.

The results showed the power of these practices, with participating shelters reporting a 170% increase in return-to-home in-field placements alone. Nearly 500 more lost dogs were returned to their homes from the shelter or in-field over the same period the previous year. Watch this video to see more about the challenge and results. The progress didn't end with the challenge. Eighty-eight percent of the shelters that reported results told us they planned to continue the new practices implemented during the challenge — with 27 shelters achieving no-kill since participating in the challenge.

With these return-to-home successes clear, in May 2025 animal services officers from 91 communities stepped up to pilot innovative, community-based field services tactics with the Paws in the Field Challenge — with the goal of saving more pets' lives by increasing return-to-home rates both in-field and in-shelter.

Bryant Animal Control and Adoption Center was participating in this challenge, when Kenobi the dog was lost, found, and returned home.

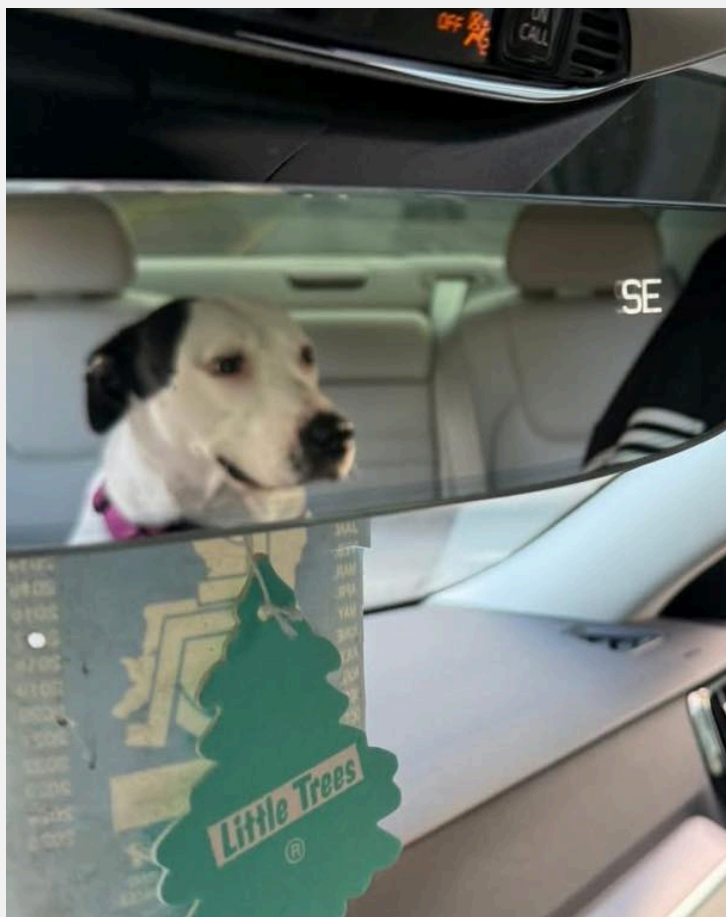


Animal services officers introduced new practices, including:

- Using field services kits, which included microchip scanners, PetHub tags, and community outreach tools
- Expanding field investigation efforts, with officers scanning all stray animals for microchips, checking tags, and canvassing the neighborhood to find the pet's owner before bringing the pet to the shelter — making direct contact with owners whenever possible to reunite pets in the field, and
- Providing reclaim flyers and door hangers at intersections near where the pet was found, helping community members assist in the return of lost pets

You can see all the practices participants were asked to implement on the Paws in the Field Challenge web page — and here are some of the related materials, resources, and tools that anyone can use to build, support, and expand return-to-home practices in your community (you'll find even more on the challenge web page):

- Paws in the Field: Real-World Strategies for Officers on the Frontlines
- Using Heat Mapping in Field Services (Video, Google Maps Guide, and Templates)
- Paws in the Field Challenge Operations Guide
- Paws in the Field Challenge Marketing and Communications Guide



Animal Assistance League of Slidell

MORE INFO



“THE POWER OF OFFICERS STEPPING UP OUTSIDE THE SHELTER WALLS TO ENGAGE WITH NEIGHBORS, APPLY NEW TOOLS AND TRAINING, AND BUILD PROACTIVE SYSTEMS THAT KEEP MORE PETS OUT OF SHELTERS, AND GET THEM BACK HOME FASTER, IS CLEAR”



The power of officers stepping up outside the shelter walls to engage with neighbors, apply new tools and training, and build proactive systems that keep more pets out of shelters, and get them back home faster, is clear in the eye-opening results: More than 2,500 pets — including Kenobi — were reunited with their families in the 91 participating communities.

Ninety-nine percent of the organizations reporting results told us they would continue the return-to-home practices they piloted during the challenge. One amazing example of this success involves collaboration between two agencies. Challenge participant Asheville Humane Society in North Carolina reported that their animal services colleagues at the City of Asheville Animal Services embraced the proactive return-to-home practices from the challenge.

Working closely with AHS's community sheltering team, Asheville Animal Services officers reunited more pets in the field than they admitted to the shelter during the month of the challenge!

"The entire team deserves a standing ovation for working so hard on behalf of the animals in our community," Jennifer Walter, Asheville Humane Society's director of operations, told us.

Another success story involved a pup named Jane, found by an Animal Assistance League of Slidell officer during the challenge. Instead of bringing Jane right to the shelter, the officer checked for online lost pet listings — and found Jane's lost pet post on Facebook. The officer contacted the owner, and Jane was able to go right home.

"Because our officers took the time in the field to search lost pet posts," AALS Senior Officer Sheila Fuller told us, "Jane never had to spend a day in the shelter!"

Reuniting lost pets with their people is one of the most critical roles for shelters and animal officers across the country. Boosting your return-to-home rates by implementing proven practices — and innovating new ones — also proactively decreases dog intake and increases lifesaving.

Ready to help some more lost pets get back home in your community? We hope so!

Check out the Return to Home Challenge and Paws in the Field Challenge web pages for complete lists of the practices that challenge participants piloted in their communities — with supporting resources to help you do the same.

You can also implement other tried-and-true return-to-home practices like waiving or reducing reclaim fees by at least 50%; using Petco Love Lost for lost and found pet reports; and hosting low-cost or free microchip clinics, and offering microchips at the shelter and in the field.

From statistically significant improvements, to individual pets who are at home on a couch instead of waiting in one of your kennels — it is clear small changes that prioritize returning lost pets back home can make a significant impact for your community, and in your lifesaving. In addition to the Return to Home and Paws in the Field challenge web pages, we've got even more tips, tools, and resources about expanding your return-to-home efforts.

Learn more about the Best Friends Network and how you can participate in future challenges at bestfriends.org/network.



Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter (BARCS)

MORE INFO



NACA ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL TODAY MAGAZINE

*Empowering animal care & control professionals &
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