

ANIMAL



Spring 2026

CARE & CONTROL TODAY

INSIDE ...

CELEBRATING THE 2026 NACA AWARD WINNERS!

**RESOURCES AND
STRATEGIES FOR
COMMUNICATING WITH
YOUR SPANISH-SPEAKING
COMMUNITY**

**BUILDING WHAT'S
NEXT: THE 2026 NACA
STATE ASSOCIATION
LEADERSHIP SUMMIT**

**NACA IN-PERSON TRAINING
IS BACK!**

A publication of the National Animal Care and Control Association



Spring 2026

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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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 step into the energy and renewal of Spring 2026, I'm reminded of how much growth, both seen and unseen, happens in seasons like this. Not just in nature, but within our profession and the community we've built together.

This spring feels especially meaningful. Coming out of the NACA State Association Leadership Summit, I'm filled with a renewed sense of momentum and possibility. Bringing together leaders from across the country reminded us that while our challenges may look different from state to state, our purpose is shared and powerful.

At NACA, we are evolving alongside you. We are actively working to strengthen the member experience, making it easier to connect, access resources, and feel supported in your work, whether that is through our new app, enhanced member tools, or more intentional opportunities for collaboration.

We are also thinking bigger. Not just nationally, but beginning to explore how we can support and connect animal care and control professionals internationally. The work you do matters far beyond borders, and we are excited about what that future can look like.

Our world and our work can still feel heavy at times. Resources are stretched, expectations are high, and the needs continue to grow. But what continues to stand out to me is this: we are not doing this alone. The strength of this profession has always been rooted in its people.

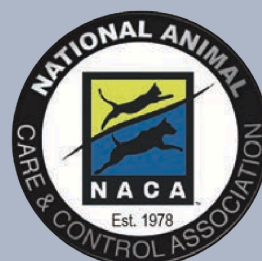
This season, I encourage all of us to lean into that connection. To continue choosing collaboration over division, curiosity over criticism, and support over isolation. When we do that, we do not just sustain this work; we move it forward.

Spring is a time of growth, and at NACA, that growth is intentional. We are building, improving, and expanding, with you at the center of it all.

Thank you for being part of this community,
and for the role you play in shaping what comes next.

Jerrica Owen,

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER





From the first call to the final outcome, dispatchers and Animal Control Officers represent the full spectrum of response.

THE VOICES BEHIND THE WORK: HONORING ACOS AND DISPATCHERS

Each April, our profession pauses to recognize two groups whose impact is felt every single day, often without recognition: Animal Control Officers and Public Safety Telecommunicators, our dispatchers. While their roles may look different on the surface, they are deeply connected by one shared truth. They are the first link in the chain of response, care, and public safety.

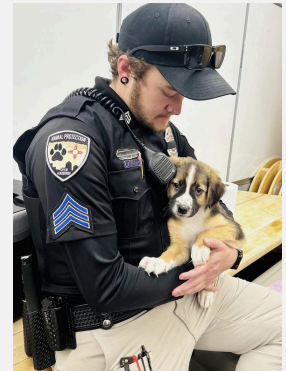
National Animal Control Officer Appreciation Week was established to bring awareness to the critical role ACOs play in both public safety and animal welfare. It highlights not only enforcement, but education, community engagement, and lifesaving work that often goes unseen.



At the same time, **National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week**, observed annually in April, was created to recognize all dispatchers as the calm voice on the other end of the line when someone is experiencing one of the most difficult moments of their life. Over time, these two observances have become closely aligned, and many agencies now recognize them together, because in reality, their work is inseparable.

Before an officer arrives on scene, before lights and sirens, there is a voice. Dispatchers are the ones gathering critical information, calming callers, prioritizing responses, and coordinating resources, often handling multiple emergencies at once. They are tasked with making rapid decisions, asking the right questions, and maintaining composure in situations most people will never experience. Many of those calls involve animals, from loose dogs and injured wildlife to cruelty cases and disaster response. Their ability to triage, document, and communicate effectively sets the tone for everything that follows.

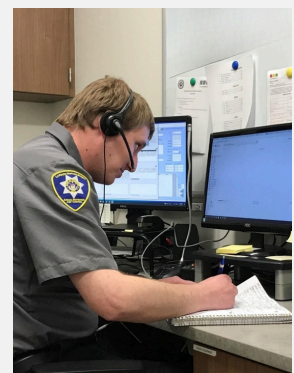
Then come the Animal Control Officers. They step into situations that require a unique blend of compassion, enforcement, problem-solving, and resilience. They are responding to neglect, abuse, public safety concerns, and community needs, often in emotionally complex environments. They are educators, investigators, responders, and advocates, all in one role.



What makes this recognition especially meaningful is that neither role stands alone. Dispatchers and ACOs are part of the same system, one that depends on communication, trust, and coordination. A dispatcher's ability to gather accurate information directly impacts an officer's safety and effectiveness in the field. An ACO's response and follow-through reinforce the trust that began with that first phone call. Together, they represent the full spectrum of response, from the first call to the final outcome.



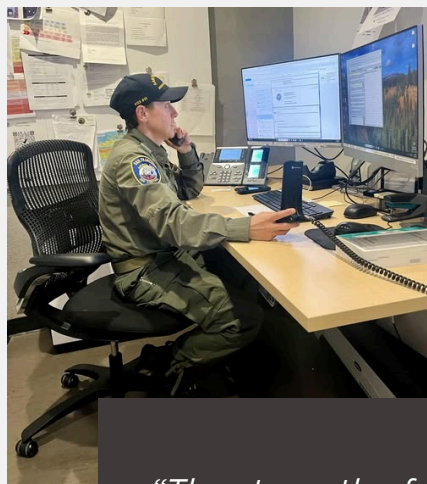
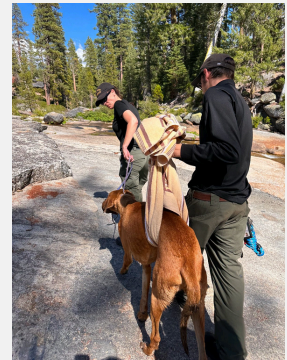
Both roles carry a weight that is not always visible. Dispatchers absorb the emotion of every call without ever seeing the resolution. They may guide someone through a crisis and never know the outcome.



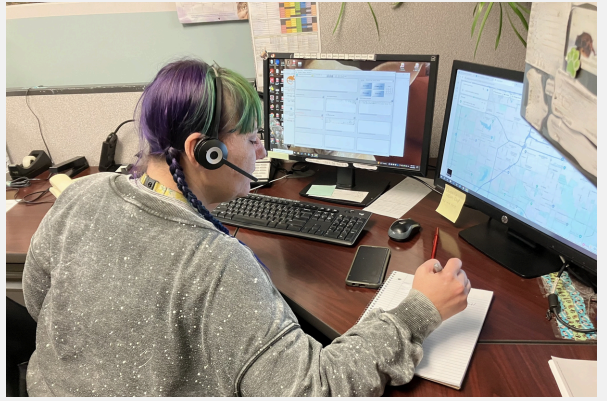
Animal Control Officers step into difficult environments, often navigating conflict, trauma, and high expectations, all while maintaining professionalism and compassion. And yet, both continue to show up, day after day. While this week is dedicated to appreciation, the impact of this work extends far beyond a few days in April. It is reflected in every animal reunited with its family, every crisis de-escalated, every life saved, and every community made safer. At NACA, we recognize that advancing this profession means supporting both the people in the field and the voices behind the scenes. It means investing in training, wellness, communication, and systems that allow both Animal Control Officers and dispatchers to succeed together.

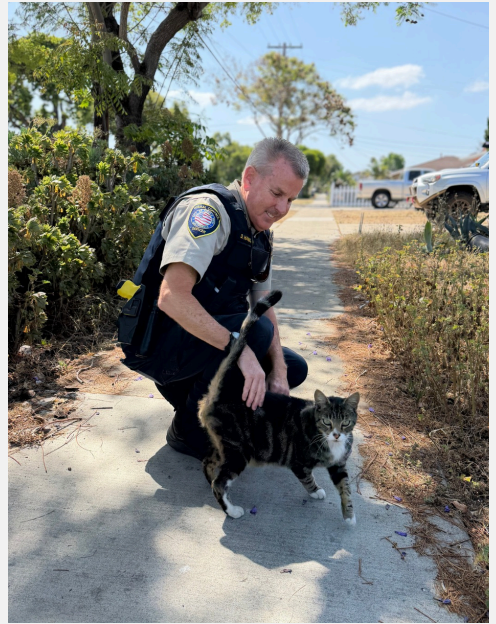
To the Animal Control Officers who step into the unknown with professionalism and compassion, and to the dispatchers who answer the call, steady the moment, and guide the response, thank you. Your work matters, your impact is real, and this profession is stronger because of you.

The following pages feature a curated collection of photos shared throughout the week, offering a visual reflection of the dedication, professionalism, and impact seen across the field.



"The strength of this profession has always been rooted in its people."







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.

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.

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Special Discount for NACA Members
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Learn more at www.nacanet.org



In Person NACA Training

We know online learning isn't for everyone, and that's why NACA has brought 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.

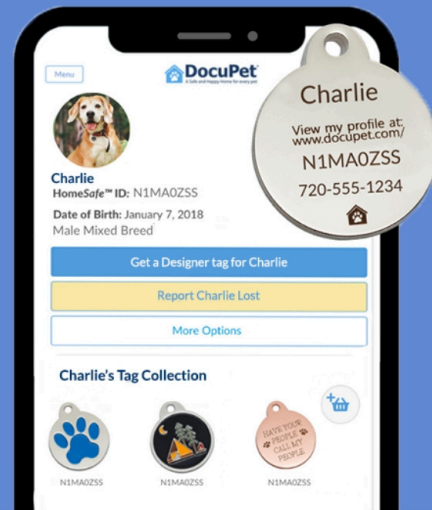
Courses currently available in person:

- ACO I: Foundations of Animal Control
- ACO II: Advanced Animal Control Practices
- ACO III: Leadership & Professional Development (hybrid)
- Mental Health First Aid Certification
- Field Forward Process Improvement Workshop
- ShelterSafe

Interested in What's Next?

As we begin planning our 2027 schedule, NACA is actively seeking host agencies for upcoming trainings and events. If you're interested in bringing NACA to your community or want to learn more about future dates, please reach out to naca@nacanet.org.

The new standard for pet licensing.



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.



For administrators

A turnkey solution that allows for a streamlined and automated licensing program which yields positive results year over year.



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.

Increase license sales

Most partners experience a 10% sales increase in just 6 months, for example:



Over 70k licenses sold annually

15% increase in sales

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Partnering with DocuPet has had a wonderful impact on our pet licensing program. We've seen increased revenue and donations, and our staff has saved hours of time previously spent on administrative tasks. Thanks to DocuPet, our staff can focus more of their time and resources on innovative programs to help license more pets in our community.



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

Learn more at partnerships.docupet.com



Serving All Our Community: Resources and Strategies for Communicating with Your Spanish-Speaking Community

The United States is a country of many cultures—and many languages. More than 20% of U.S. residents speak a language other than English at home. Overwhelmingly, that language is Spanish, with more than 13% of the population identifying as primarily Spanish-speaking. Clear communication is one of the most important tools animal control officers have, and accessible language resources help ensure that no community member—or animal—is left behind.

For many animal welfare organizations, however, finding or creating resources to effectively communicate with Spanish-speaking communities can be challenging. These barriers may lead to cultural misunderstandings that erode trust on both sides. Building accessible language resources is not only beneficial for pet owners—it strengthens our organizations as well. Spanish-speaking communities represent an important and engaged segment of pet owners. When we fail to fully engage with these communities, we risk taking in animals unnecessarily and missing opportunities to connect with potential adopters, volunteers, and foster families. At a time when kennels are overflowing, we need the support of our entire community more than ever.



**mutual
rescue™**

who saves who?

By using free resources and applying simple, practical strategies, we can help bridge this communication gap—improving public safety, reducing shelter overcrowding, and helping more pets find safe, loving homes. Below are several tools and techniques to support officers in the field while also encouraging broader community engagement.

Mutual Rescue offers more than 40 handouts covering pet care, behavior, and health. Many address common issues animal control officers encounter in the field, such as safe outdoor housing, the importance of vaccines, and microchipping.

These materials were developed with input from veterinarians and behaviorists, written in clear, easy-to-understand language, and translated by a native Spanish speaker. They are free to download, customizable with your organization’s logo, and ready to use.

Mutual Rescue is also developing a series of short ‘Spanish for Animal Welfare Workers’ videos, with the first eight currently available.



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shelterpetdata.org



While many organizations offer small pay incentives for bilingual staff, bilingual ability is often not listed as a requirement. If your department serves a large Spanish-speaking population, consider updating job descriptions to reflect that need. Instead of recruiting only Animal Control Officers, consider specifically hiring Bilingual Animal Control Officers, making language ability a core qualification rather than an optional skill.

A wide range of translation apps and devices are available at various price points. Tools such as SpanishDict.com, which focuses specifically on Spanish, can be particularly helpful for written communication. Although AI translation is not yet perfect—especially when it comes to animal welfare terminology—it can still play an important role in opening lines of communication and building trust.

In addition to ensuring legal and enforcement documents are available in Spanish, shelters should also offer adoption, foster, and volunteer forms in Spanish. Providing these materials demonstrates that Spanish-speaking community members are welcome and valued. If in-house translation is not available, freelance platforms such as Fiverr offer access to certified translators who can assist with accurate and culturally appropriate translations.

Even without language barriers, communication can be challenging in many situations, and it is not always realistic for all staff to become fully bilingual. However, demonstrating effort and cultural awareness goes a long way. By equipping staff with the right tools and taking a few additional steps, we can better engage our entire community—leading to stronger relationships, improved outcomes, and more lives saved, regardless of language.





PAWS FOR A CHANGE

BY NACA

SOURCE: THE BROOKS INSTITUTE OF FOR ANIMAL RIGHTS LAW & POLICY

Federal/National

Animal Welfare Act Amendments (S.1538):

Would strengthen enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act by expanding federal authority and improving oversight of licensed facilities, aiming to enhance accountability for animal care across breeding, research, and exhibition settings.

PUPP Act (Providing for Unhoused People and Pets Act):

Proposes federal funding to help homeless shelters accommodate pets, reducing barriers to housing and keeping people and their animals together—highlighting the growing recognition of the human-animal bond in public policy.

Federal Farm Bill (2026 – Draft):

Includes sweeping provisions impacting billions of farm animals, with ongoing debate over whether federal law should override state animal welfare standards, regulate confinement practices, and address puppy mill oversight. The bill remains one of the most consequential—and contested—animal policy vehicles at the national level.

State/Local

Indiana HB 1355: Streamlines permitting for large livestock operations by creating a pre-application process, setting timelines for approvals, and limiting additional upgrade requirements for existing facilities—aimed at improving efficiency for agricultural producers.

Colorado SB 26-123— Bans ventilation shutdown as a poultry depopulation method used during disease outbreaks, directing agencies toward more humane alternatives while maintaining effective response protocols.

Nebraska LB 663: Establishes training requirements for county planning officials and standardizes zoning and permit review processes for agricultural operations, including livestock facilities. By improving consistency and transparency in local decision-making, the bill has direct implications for animal housing, care conditions, and how communities manage the growth of animal agriculture.



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- Jurisdiction validation

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"Progressive Solutions® has always been very responsive to any questions or issues we have and are quick to help with last minute changes. We appreciate their support and ability to meet all of our needs."

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“ AS WE MOVE THROUGH 2026, STATES ARE NOT ONLY UPDATING LAWS— THEY ARE RETHINKING SYSTEMS. LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS ARE INCREASINGLY FOCUSED ON TRANSPARENCY, RESPONSIBLE PET ACQUISITION, AND ALIGNING ANIMAL SERVICES WITH BROADER PUBLIC SAFETY AND COMMUNITY PRIORITIES. THIS SHIFT REFLECTS A GROWING UNDERSTANDING THAT SUSTAINABLE ANIMAL WELFARE OUTCOMES REQUIRE CLEAR POLICY, STRONG PARTNERSHIPS, AND A FOUNDATION OF TRUST BETWEEN AGENCIES AND THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.

Indiana HB 1165

Amends crimes against animals and removes the partial liability for forcibly entering and removing a domestic animal from a motor vehicle. Previously, a person could be liable for half the cost of repairing damage to a motor vehicle caused by that person’s forcible entry.

Oregon HB 4034

Amends provisions related to the oversight of animal rescue entities. The legislation revises requirements for animal rescue entities and state departmental authorities related to the inspection, auditing, and licensing of those entities. The legislation also transfers enforcement authority over animal rescue entities, excluding veterinary facilities, from the Oregon State Veterinarian to the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

New York

New York City Council Forms Animal Welfare Caucus to Advocate for Animal Rights





Maddie's Fund

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NACA IS A PROUD RECIPIENT OF FUNDING FROM
MADDIE'S FUND®, #THANKSTOMADDIE.

2026 NACA Award Winners!

BY NACA

Each year, NACA proudly recognizes individuals and organizations who are making a meaningful impact in animal care and control. The NACA Awards celebrate leadership, innovation, and a commitment to advancing the profession at every level. This year's honorees represent the very best of our field. From dedicated officers and forward-thinking leaders to strong state associations driving progress in their communities, each recipient embodies the values that move this work forward. These awards are more than recognition.

They are a reflection of the passion, professionalism, and perseverance that define animal care and control. They highlight what is possible when individuals and teams commit to doing the work thoughtfully, collaboratively, and with purpose.

We are proud to celebrate this year's recipients and grateful for the example they set for our profession.

Leader of the Year



Colleen Bray

DIRECTOR, BOONE COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES, KY



Thank you to ACES for sponsoring the NACA Annual Awards and helping us celebrate the very best of our profession.

Shelter Professional of the Year



Armando Tejada

CHICAGO ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL, IL

ACO of the Year

Alex Harbaugh

DEPUTY, JEFFERSON COUNTY SHERIFF'S
DEPARTMENT, TN



Kevin Burton-Crow

DETECTIVE, THURSTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S
OFFICE, WA





Diane Lane Award

June Thomas

PRESIDENT OF THE COALITION OF ANIMAL
RESCUE TRANSPORTERS (CART)

State Association of the Year

**Kansas Animal Control
Association**



Agency of the Year

Mission Viejo Animal Services, CA



Rookie of the Year

Thomas Young-Bayer

ACO, JUNEAU ANIMAL RESCUE, AK

Strengthening Animal Welfare Through Data: Insights From the 2025 SAC Annual Data Report and Field Services Report

by Tori Fugate - Shelter Animals Count at the ASPCA

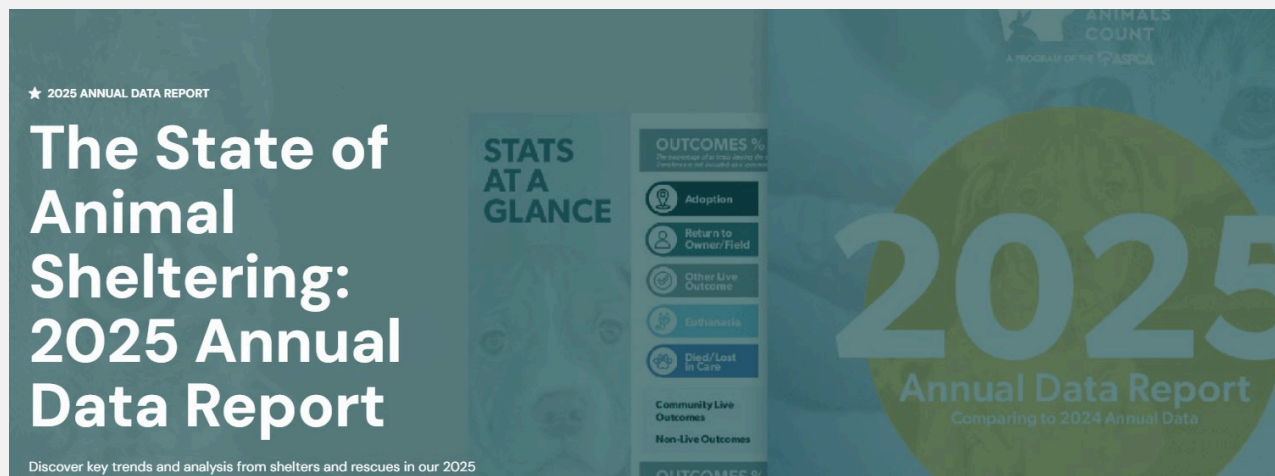


Each year, Shelter Animals Count (SAC), now a program of the ASPCA (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), releases our Annual Data Report, a comprehensive, national snapshot of the trends shaping companion animal welfare in the United States.



The newly released 2025 report continues this work, offering data-driven insights that help animal care and control agencies understand where progress is being made and where persistent challenges require attention. When paired with the findings from SAC's Field Services Report, published in December 2025, a more complete picture emerges: data is not simply a reporting task, it is an essential strategy for shaping the future of animal services.

The 2025 Annual Data Report highlights several important national patterns. An estimated 5.8 million dogs and cats entered shelters and rescues in 2025, signaling that organizations across the country continue to feel the strain of high intake and capacity pressures. Many agencies are balancing increased demand with economic pressures, workforce challenges, and shifting expectations of the role animal services should play in their communities. Despite these pressures, live outcome rates remained steady compared to 2024, with shelters working to sustain or improve placement even as resources were stretched. The report also featured deep dives into the transfer landscape, return-to-owner efforts, and comprehensive animal-level analysis, looking at data on animal age, size, organization types, and much more.



Complementing these national trends, the 2025 Field Services Report offers an in-depth look at the work happening beyond shelter walls. The report, which was the first data report to look at field services work, analyzed more than 344,000 field activities from 35 states, representing 143 de-identified organizations using standardized activity types from the animal management software, Shelterluv, during the reporting period from January 2023 through June 2025. The findings looking into three main categories: Quality-of-Life activities, which made up 60% of all activities, Public Safety, and Welfare. What SAC found was that field services teams are increasingly functioning as frontline community support providers, responding not only to traditional animal welfare concerns but also to situations involving human social needs and broader public safety calls.

The report documents shifts in call types, response volume, and field outcomes, while also highlighting the growing emphasis on proactive, community-centered engagement, over reactive enforcement. This data helps agencies benchmark their work, advocate for staffing and funding, and demonstrate the essential role field services play in community well-being.

Together, these reports reinforce a critical message: your data matters. As the animal welfare landscape continues to evolve, the need for reliable, comprehensive data has never been greater. By reporting to SAC, shelters and rescues contribute to a trusted national dataset and organizations gain a host of tools and resources. Participation ensures that animal care and control agencies are represented in the national story, reinforcing their essential public safety role in communities and ensuring their work is counted. Data remains one of the most powerful tools we have: it guides our priorities, strengthens our programs, and allows animal services to serve communities with clarity, confidence, and compassion.

To read the full 2025 Annual Data Report, the Field Services Report, or to register your organization with Shelter Animals Count, visit shelteranimalscount.org.



Waivers may seem like a solution for transferring liability when adopting out a risky dog. But legally, a signed waiver does not erase the organization's responsibility—especially if there is prior knowledge of the dog's behavior. Courts often find that shelters and agencies hold a continuing duty of care, no matter the paperwork. For municipal agencies, the issue is compounded: liability waivers rarely shield government entities from claims. Ultimately, thorough documentation, risk-based decision-making, and full transparency remain the most reliable safeguards for both officers and agencies.

When Euthanasia Isn't Optional

Behavioral euthanasia is one of the most painful realities of the job. But in many cases, it's not optional. Holding onto a dangerous dog without a safe adoption pathway endangers staff, volunteers, foster families, and the public. For ACOs, this reality often plays out in the field. Officers may be the first to document aggression, enforce dangerous dog ordinances, or testify in court cases. Their reports and actions directly affect both community safety and insurance risk. These are not cold or careless decisions—they are decisions made to protect people, preserve resources, and keep doors open for the majority of animals that can be safely rehomed.

What Officers and Communities Can Do

- Document Thoroughly: Clear, detailed reports from ACOs on bite incidents, behavioral concerns, and housing conditions create a strong foundation for risk management.
- Support Behavioral Programs: Training, enrichment, and behavior modification programs reduce liability while giving more animals a safe chance at adoption. - Promote Prevention: Spay/neuter, licensing, and community outreach reduce intake and minimize the flow of high-risk cases into shelters.
- Be the Safety Net: Fostering, adopting, and volunteering—especially with pets that are often overlooked—helps relieve shelter pressure and mitigate tough placement decisions.

A Shelter Without Insurance Can't Operate

It really is that simple. Insurance is not just paperwork—it's the safety net that allows animal services agencies to save lives while protecting communities. Without it, there's no intake plan, no adoptions, and no second chances. As a profession, we must work together—field officers, administrators, nonprofits, and the public—to ensure shelters don't have to choose between safety and compassion. With the right systems, documentation, and community support, we can give animals second chances without sacrificing public trust or officer safety.





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

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with his family thanks
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we'll reunite.



Welcome Dr. Strong!

Dr. Strong has been appointed to the NACA National Board of Directors to fill an existing vacancy, bringing with her a depth of expertise that meaningfully strengthens and complements the current composition of our Board. Her background helps fill key gaps in veterinary medicine and animal welfare leadership, and we are especially excited to welcome a board-certified veterinarian to further inform and guide our work.

An American Veterinary Medical Association board-certified animal welfare veterinarian, Dr. Strong brings nearly three decades of experience advancing animal welfare and supporting the human-animal bond. Her career spans military service as a Captain in the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps, general veterinary practice, and extensive leadership in municipal sheltering and animal services.

She has led high-performing shelter teams to improve live-release rates, reduce length of stay, and address complex cruelty and hoarding cases through innovative, community-centered approaches. Her leadership roles have included staff veterinarian for the City of San Antonio, Medical Director for Wake County, and Director of Orange County Animal Services, where she oversaw shelter operations, field services, and community programs. Today, through her work with Merck Animal Health, she continues to support organizations nationwide through training, biosecurity advancement, and infectious disease consultation.

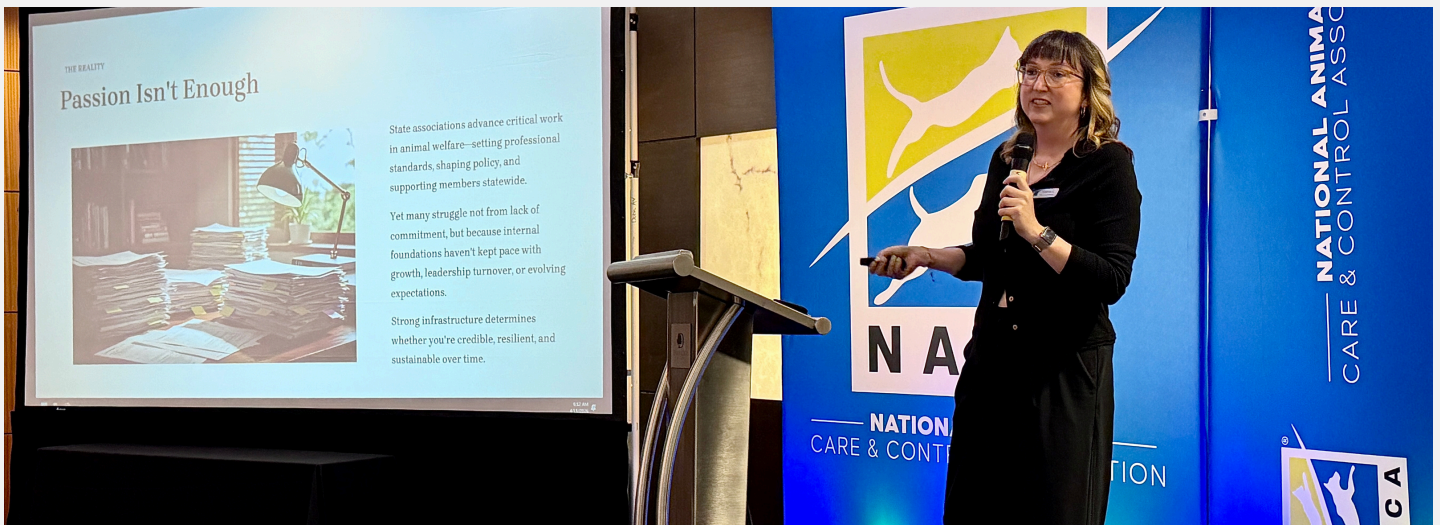
Dr. Strong also serves on the American College of Animal Welfare Exam Committee, mentors veterinarians pursuing board certification, and contributes to the field as a published author and thought leader.

We are honored to welcome Dr. Strong to the NACA Board and look forward to the expertise and perspective she will bring as we continue advancing the profession.

For those interested in future board service, NACA Board positions follow a formal nomination process, with a slate developed by the Nominations Committee based on organizational needs and desired expertise, and final selections are voted on by the membership.



Building What's Next: The 2026 NACA State Association Leadership Summit



BY NACA

This spring, leaders from across the country gathered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for the 2026 NACA State Association Leadership Summit, an event grounded in purpose, shaped by collaboration, and focused on the future of animal care and control.

The Summit brought together 113 representatives from 43 state associations nationwide, each carrying unique perspectives, challenges, and opportunities from their respective communities. While the work may look different across regions, one theme remained consistent throughout the event: a shared commitment to strengthening the profession and building systems that better support both people and animals.

From the outset, the Summit was designed to be more than a series of presentations. It created space for meaningful dialogue, peer-to-peer learning, and honest conversations about where the profession stands today and where it needs to go. Attendees engaged in discussions around funding models, legislative priorities, organizational development, and strategies to increase access to training and resources at the state level.



*"This is where we start to build consistency across the profession, sharing what works, identifying gaps, and creating a more aligned approach moving forward." Spencer Conover
NACA COO*

One of the most impactful aspects of the Summit was the opportunity for leaders to learn directly from one another. Associations at different stages of development were able to exchange ideas, share lessons learned, and explore practical solutions to common challenges. These conversations reinforced the value of connection and the importance of not working in isolation.

Throughout the event, there was a clear emphasis on aligning efforts with national best practices while still honoring the realities of local implementation. This balance is critical as the profession continues to evolve. By grounding progress in shared standards while allowing for flexibility, state associations are better positioned to drive meaningful, sustainable change within their communities. The Summit also highlighted the importance of partnerships. Organizations and supporters who share a commitment to advancing animal care and control played an important role, contributing not only resources but also insights and collaboration. These partnerships are essential to expanding capacity, increasing access, and ensuring that progress continues beyond a single event.

Beyond the structured sessions, the Summit provided opportunities for connection that often become the most lasting takeaways. Conversations continued between sessions, during meals, and through informal networking moments. These interactions build trust, strengthen relationships, and create a sense of shared ownership in the work ahead.



As the Summit concluded, there was a collective sense of momentum. Leaders left with new ideas, stronger connections, and a renewed focus on what is possible. The discussions that took place in Pittsburgh will continue to influence decisions, shape strategies, and support growth across state associations in the months and years ahead.

For those looking to get more involved, one of the most impactful ways to contribute is at the state level. State associations are the backbone of progress within this profession, serving as a critical bridge between national resources and local implementation.

As Jerrica Owen, CEO of NACA, shared, “Meaningful change in this profession often starts close to home, and it’s the strength of our state associations that turns that local impact into national progress.” Whether through leadership, committee involvement, or simply engaging in conversations and initiatives, your participation helps strengthen your state’s capacity to support its agencies, officers, and communities. Meaningful change often starts close to home, and collective engagement at the state level is what drives broader advancement across the field.



At NACA, this Summit represents more than an annual gathering. It reflects a broader commitment to investing in leadership, strengthening infrastructure, and creating pathways for collaboration at every level.

As the organization continues to grow and expand its reach, both nationally and with an eye toward future international engagement, the focus remains clear: improving the member experience, supporting those doing the work, and building a stronger, more connected profession.

The 2026 Summit was not just a moment of reflection. It was a step forward.

Participants also took part in a brief LEGO exercise, symbolizing resilience and the idea of building something stronger together, a nod to Pittsburgh's spirit!



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