



No More Homeless Pets Forum
March 29 2004

Making the Most of Your Resources

Nathan Winograd of Tompkins County SPCA in New York answers your questions and offers advice for making the most of your resources. **There are so many pressing things to do, but your resources are limited. How do you decide what to take on? How can you get the biggest bang for your buck?**

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Nathan Winograd

Should we provide financial help for owned animals medical needs?

Question from Jess:

We have been getting more and more calls from the public frantically trying to find financial help for medical needs of their owned pets. Many have been hit by cars and need immediate attention or have long-term, expensive problems like broken legs, cancerous tumors, etc. and of course they have no money, but don't want the animal to die.

We don't have the funds available to help them, and don't have a medical room or supplies at our shelter, but also don't want to see an animal suffer. Many of these people really do love their animals and aren't trying to just get something for free. We feel that if the vets turn them away, and we turn them away, what humane message are we sending? What do you do in situations like this?

Response from Nathan:

Let me be a bit long winded in the introduction before I get to the heart of the matter: what should a shelter do for people who cannot afford medical care for their pets?

The Introduction:

A shelter needs a comprehensive plan to save lives. We have written a 20-page guide called "Building a No Kill Community" which outlines these in more detail and is available on the Best Friends website. In it, we outline what we believe are the programs and services we believe are vital to No Kill success. Other organizations have stated that there is no such thing as one No Kill plan. I disagree. The challenges we face may change a bit from community to community, and every community has unique resources that must be brought to bear, but the building blocks are always the same regardless of where you live: spay/neuter, adoption, feral cat assistance, behavior and medical rehabilitation, fundraising, public relations, and pet retention programs.

There are many reasons why people surrender pets to shelters and they run the gamut from the obscene to the sublime. I will not engage in apologia. Some people should never have pets in the first place. But they do. There is an old saying, "Every poor man has a dog. An even poorer one has more." If we are ever going to get to the root of the problem, we need to put in place programs that impact real world behavior; that focus on the poorer man with many dogs. Solutions must be targeted to a real world problem, and have the ability to deliver results.

So let's get to the real world. In the real world, people get puppies because puppies are so damn cute and then the puppy grows up and the behavior is not so cute anymore. In the real world, cats pee outside the litterbox or dogs growl at the kids and folks don't know what to do. In the real world, people work long hours and they don't provide adequate socialization for their dogs. A kid sneezes and sneezes and the parent will blame the cat. And, as the question correctly indicates, people's pets get sick or injured and they can't afford the costs of care. That's the real world. So we need to address it, because all of those pets are at risk for relinquishment to the shelter.

First of all, many of these pets are better off at your shelter. So let them bring them. But others just need help to overcome some perceived issue or crisis. And providing that might be the difference between a relinquishment to your shelter or a pet in a happy home.

In terms of how to address it, there are plenty of outlets: newsletters, website, flyers, posters, public service announcements, telephones, newspapers, you name it. Give people information and resources to address the issues that confront them as pet owners. The shelter - and the shelter website - should be a one stop shop for accurate and helpful information on everything from resolving litterbox issues to coping with cat allergies, from controlling "nuisance" barking to pet friendly rentals in the area. Most of these are free: pet behavior advice can be on fact sheets, on video, can be provided by volunteers, or local fanciers. The more you provide in terms of advice and help in keeping pets in their homes, the easier it will be to save lives.

But some are not free. Spay/neuter is the most obvious example. Subsidizing the cost of spay/neuter takes dollars, but over the long-term, it is cost-effective. The question poses another: should a shelter subsidize medical care to keep pets in their homes?

The Heart of the Question:

Should we? We don't have that service at our shelter. People can surrender those pets, but they won't get them back. But since resources and programs are not static, I believe that such a program is probably inevitable in this, as well as other communities as we get success in reducing impounds and saving treatables. The goal of No-Kill is to provide animals with a cradle to grave guarantee of a home. That implies either the shelter will help people with the costs of care or will impound the pet and provide it themselves. We have chosen the latter route. In San Francisco under Richard Avanzino, they went the former. It was not uncommon for people to pay for their veterinary care with everything from an old fashioned IOU to tennis balls for shelter dogs.

So while a shelter may not currently have the funds available, if the shelter hopes to get to No-Kill, it will have to address the issue at some point in the future - so it must build the infrastructure and fundraising to save those lives.

The more disturbing part is the lack of a medical room or supplies at the shelter - which probably means the shelter itself is probably killing treatable pets. The plan must be put in place to get there, which I cover in much more detail in the question about treatables posed below (question number 3 for today). Because when you build the infrastructure to save treatable pets at the shelter, you are in a position where you can better address sick and injured pets in people's homes either by simply taking them in, or providing subsidized care. But how can you address this without a plan for your shelter's sick or injured pets?

I always felt that a shelter's first obligation was to homeless animals. Sure, those animals in your question are at risk for homelessness. It is important to address it at some point in your organizational growth, but right now their care is primarily their owner's responsibility. In other words, heal thyself first.

Spending money on treatable animals

Question from Ann:

The main issue the local shelter in my community doesn't treat animals with things like heartworm, broken bones, or anything requiring time is because they don't have the space. They say they can't tie up kennels housing these animals when they are getting so many healthy, adoptable animals in. They also don't want it to seem like they only have sick or injured animals or they fear the public will go to a pet store instead.

While they do have a good number of fosters, many are not prepared or willing to foster animals that have contagious diseases to their own animals, or that require a great deal of medical attention. I'm just a volunteer at the shelter so feel like I don't have a lot of pull, but would love any suggestions on how to get them started on helping animals with treatable issues.

Response from Nathan:

You have three separate issues tied into your dilemma and in order to answer you fairly, let me separate and then tackle each. You indicate that the shelter doesn't have space to treat animals whose rehabilitation would take some time because of the numbers of healthy animals coming in. Second, you indicate that the shelter does not

want to offer compromised animals for fear potential adopters would walk away and go to a pet store filled with "cute and cuddly" puppies and kittens instead. Finally, you state that the shelter's foster families will not care for these animals in their homes for fear they will be contagious to their own pets. So, how do you convince the shelter to begin the road to saving treatable sick and injured animals when the obstacles are: (1) space and time; (2) public perceptions of shelter animals; and (3) a reluctant volunteer base.

Rephrased a bit,

1. Should you treat treatable sick and injured animals when you have more healthy animals than you are placing?

First of all, let's call it for what it is. It is not a "space" issue per se, because the majority of these animals should be placed in foster care while they are recuperating, which does not impose the space and time pressures a pet in a shelter may. We sometimes have dogs in foster care for four, five, even six months while they are recuperating from surgery. I would do cartwheels to get a pet adopted if he or she had been in the shelter that long, but in foster care, it doesn't pose the same types of concerns. In addition, if you set up an infirmary or isolation area, you are not tying up space on your adoption floor.

In addition, the more comprehensive your adoption and spay/neuter program, the more you can open up available kennel space. But it may be an issue about priorities, at least at first.

Before I came here, Tompkins County SPCA was killing healthy dogs and cats. But they were also sending some treatable dogs and cats into foster care. Valerie was an SPCA foster parent who took home some under aged kittens and then brought them back when they were old enough for adoption. The problem was the shelter felt it had more kittens and cats than it could hold and ended up killing Valerie's foster kittens when they didn't get adopted right away. How much sense did it make to foster kittens who weren't ready for adoption, when the shelter was killing already adoptable kittens?

It angered Valerie since she put her heart and soul into those kittens, and it put the shelter in an awkward position. Should it save Valerie's kittens by killing others? And that is the argument your shelter seems to be making. Why spend \$200 to treat a dog with a broken bone because when he is healthy, he may either displace another healthy dog who will be killed, or may be killed himself since the shelter is still killing healthy animals. The argument has some appeal.

Treatable animals are also more expensive than healthy animals for obvious reasons. First, you have to invest resources into making them healthy, and then you have the same expenses of food and shelter once they are healthy. So if your shelter is killing healthy animals, how much sense does it make to pour resources into treatable ones? I can see why the Director doesn't see the logic.

In a community such as this, it may make more sense to engage the public in the goal of saving all healthy animals first. Saving healthy animals requires a different strategy than saving treatable ones. To save healthy animals, you need (1) comprehensive adoption programs; (2) programs to keep animals in their homes; and (3) spay/neuter to reduce the numbers of animals coming into the shelter. If your shelter and your community put your resources into those areas, you can get to a point where your shelter is saving 100% of healthy dogs and cats.

Saving treatable animals requires entirely different types of programs. Since many of these animals are not ready for homes, adoption programs will not necessarily help them. They often - though admittedly not always - need medicine, surgery, foster care, or behavior rehabilitation before they are ready to be placed in homes. So if you invest your resources there, you better make sure the adoption programs are firmly in place or your shelter will be facing the same Hobbesian choice faced with Valerie's kittens.

On top of that, where are you going to get the resources for saving treatable animals? For the dog hit by a car who needs surgery? For the medicine to treat the cat with severe URI?

When you set a goal to save all healthy animals, and you engage the community into that endeavor, and they see the progress you are making, they will support you with their hearts, homes and wallets. And once you succeed, you can then ask the same community to fund the next level of lifesaving: treatable dogs and cats. And they will be more likely to do it, because by saving all healthy animals first, you have shown them that you will use their money in measurable, lifesaving ways. You have demonstrated that you can be accountable with people's donations, and with the community's homeless animals.

It may be more advantageous to make sure your shelter has or is putting in place the programs and services to save all healthy animals first: (1) spaying and neutering all animals before it adopts them; (2) providing affordable spay/neuter for low-income households; (3) has public access shelter hours so that working families and families with children in school can visit the shelter to adopt; (4) is taking animals offsite to where people work, live and play so they can be more readily seen; (5) is attending special community events to enlist volunteers, foster families, and offering animals for adoption; (6) is competitive in terms of cost of adoption with local pet stores; (7) has an

active public relations program, so people hear about the shelter's positive heartwarming stories; (8) is working with breed and other rescue groups to place animals; (9) is offering the public free behavior advice, low-cost dog training, pet friendly rental programs, dog walker referrals, and other services before the animals are surrendered to the shelter; and more. At that point, when you do begin saving treatable animals, you will know the infrastructure is in place to find them homes once they are ready.

If your shelter is not doing these things, is not moving aggressively in that direction, you will be killing both healthy and treatable animals indefinitely. But don't be fooled by endless delays or promises that you can save the treatables at some mythical time in the future. I know it is in vogue today to announce "5-year plans" for making those sorts of lifesaving promises. Every community from Los Angeles to New York City, and points in between has announced a 5-year No-Kill goal, and while the commitment is commendable and inspires hope for the future of our movement, I am not convinced that it should take that long. There is nothing magical about the number 5, nor do I believe that for most communities, it can't be done a whole lot faster - indeed for many communities, I believe it can be done by sheer will virtually overnight.

2. Will the community lose faith in the shelter as a place to get quality pets if you offer sick and injured, or compromised animals for adoption?

This line of thinking began as an oversimplified analogy and was turned into marketing gospel by national organizations who purported to speak on behalf of shelters. Under the theory that shelters must act like department stores and have quality merchandise in order to maintain public support, national organizations promoted the view that only young and attractive animals should be made available for adoption. Otherwise, they concluded, local shelters would gain an unfavorable reputation from potential adopters that shelters were filled with "inferior" animals and adopters would increasingly turn to pet stores and breeders for their pets. The end result meant shelter animals were relegated to certain death without ever being offered for adoption.

Not only is there no real evidence to support this claim, it ignores the common shelter experience. That is that many families want an older animal to avoid the training and other issues inherent with very young animals, particularly dogs, and that people do want to save lives. Tell the story of a dog hit by a car who now needs help getting on and off the couch, and they'll be lining up outside. Ask any shelter that has actually tried, it is actually easier to adopt a dog or cat with a checkered past, whether subjected to cruelty, hit by a car, overcoming some illness, or having some abnormality than your typical 2 year old cat or shepherd-mix.

3. Will volunteers support efforts to save treatable animals by bringing contagious pets into their homes?

Not only will they support it, but you can't do it without them. Anyone who tells you foster parents won't take in treatable animals is misinformed. There are many reasons why people foster but the bottom line is this: they want to help save lives. And if you ask them to, they will do it.

A non-custodial parent with a kid for the summer will foster kittens all summer. An elderly volunteer who fears they can't make a 15 year commitment to a pet will take in dogs and cats on a foster basis. Parents whose kids have gone off to college now have an empty room they will turn into an infirmary for sick pets. College students who miss the family pet back at home will take them in during the semester. And regular families with pets of their own will bring them in. Just ask, recruit, publicize and thank.

Although I think the concern is imaginary, remember there are a lot of treatable dogs and cats who are not contagious. So pets in the home is hardly a barrier: a cat with a broken leg needing cage rest; a litter of puppies; a dog going kennel crazy; or nursing youngsters with a mama.

In short, you are asking for a solution in search of a problem. Which, I am confident to note, simply does not exist.

Comment from Kathy:

Feral cats hold a very special place in my heart so know that I'm speaking from that place. I'm a member of a group that's part of a coalition doing monthly spay/neuter clinics for owned, stray and feral cats. While extraordinary surgeries are not performed, the vets do evaluate the ferals' medical needs.

I do most of the trapping, know the care taking situation, so the decision for further treatment/surgery is left to me. Many wounds are too old to stitch, but infections require antibiotics so the cat spends 10 days in a crate in my garage getting canned food laced with Clavamox. Same for females with pyometra. If a surgery is recommended, the cat goes to our organization's vet and hangs out in my garage recovering. If returning the cat to an uncaring environment is too risky, we find responsible barn homes. A woman who can control her cat allergies as long as she doesn't touch them took in two feral cats. Since she can't pet them anyway, she enjoys watching her wild companions zip around her home. That's extreme but an example of what's possible to help them.

Focus and funding is different for everyone. But I think if the humane effort of TNR is in place, treating feral cats is extremely important especially in light of the critics who say we set them up to live out miserable lives.

Comment from Celeste:

I have some quick points to add to Nathan's response:

Point 2: Will the community lose faith in the shelter as a place to get quality pets if you offer sick and injured, or compromised animals for adoption?

These days, with animal welfare advocates getting the word out so well about pet stores, most people who are still purchasing animals at pet shops genuinely think they are rescuing that animal. And if the puppy or kitten seems sick, they're even more proud of themselves. The only thing left to do is get rescued adoptables in the limelight the way the pet shop purchasables already are.

Point 3: Will volunteers support efforts to save treatable animals by bringing contagious pets into their homes?

If there is resistance in that direction, how about letting volunteers foster (and help place) the healthy, adoptable animals, instead?

Also, if an animal's 'not quite' adoptable yet, how about aggressively trolling for 'temporary' homes that will most likely turn permanent? Let's say a hyperthyroid cat. Someone in the community feels sorry for him, but isn't sure they want to commit to the extra trouble and expense involved in caring for an animal with health concerns. The shelter offers the potential adopter a chance to foster him instead, with expenses paid by the shelter. You can bet your bottom dollar that if the person is the type who would make a good home for Kitty, they're going to either find a stellar home for him, or they're going to fall in love and decide he's not so much work or expense, after all, and they'd like to adopt him.

Should you charge rescues taking animals from your shelter?

Question from Cindy:

Our shelter is based in a very rural community with little human population. Yet we have a large dog and cat population! We have been working with rescues to relocate large numbers of animal transports to shelters and rescues in other states that we work with frequently.

We do not charge the rescues anything to take our animals from us, because they are helping us out and tell us that we if we charge, they will work with other shelters that don't charge. We do give all the shots/vaccines before they leave. The problem is that we are losing money, because we are putting money into the vet care for the animal but not getting an adoption fee. So we are constantly doing fundraisers.

Is this a good use of our resources? We feel like we are in a catch-22, because in a sense I feel like we are transporting our problem away and will be doing this continuously with no end in sight. Yet, if we don't do this, then the animals will be euthanized.

We'd like to get more adoptions locally but there are not many people. It is so spread out with no local TV/radio stations, and many of the people do have a rural mentality that dogs can live chained outside or running with no collar. We end up finding a lot of locally adopted animals running at large.

Response from Nathan:

We took in a young, female husky mix after she was hit by a car and fractured both rear legs. It took several surgeries, four months of rehabilitation, spaying, vaccinations and a couple of weeks at the shelter before she was adopted into a home. The total cost of care for Nikko was well over \$3,000. We adopted her out for \$68. The math isn't hard to do. We took a beating on that one. Or did we?

Last year, we spent tens of thousands on surgery, but our "Angel Fund," our fund for such services, took in more after fundraising. So, in the end, from our accountant's perspective, Nikko's surgery and adoption was cost-effective. Not by much, but still on the revenue generation side.

Each cat spay costs us \$45. But we only charge adopters \$30. So every cat spay means we lose \$15. If we use private practice veterinarians which we do when we are jammed, we get charged about \$75 for a cat spay, sometimes more, a loss from adoption of \$45 per cat. Again, the kind of math that will quickly put your shelter in the poor house.

But we also applied for grants and fundraised. Our spay/neuter fund spent somewhere in the neighborhood of

\$40,000+ or so last year. But we took in more than that from fundraising for spay/neuter.

Adoptions by themselves are hardly every cost effective. All things being equal, we charge about \$60 per adoption, but spend somewhere in the neighborhood of \$270 per animal we take in. You are not going to do it financially on adoptions alone. Sure, you can't do it without them, but they are only one part of the picture. We also sent hundreds of animals to rescue groups after vaccinating and caring for them. We didn't charge any fees. Yet, we basically finished the year breaking even (the year before when we reduced the death rate by 75%, we actually finished the year with a surplus!) You need to take a broader perspective. And you need to commit to "constantly doing fundraisers." That's the reality of non-profit work.

And by lifesaving, whether by adoption or through no fee-based rescue groups, you will have better success with your fundraising, so the net result can be cost-effective overall. Look at it this way: each animal you place into rescue means you save money in housing, food, medical care, and in the worst scenario, on killing and carcass disposal. And by sending as many animals as you can into rescue, you can afford to put more resources (not just financial, but space, time, and care) into the animals in your shelter who can't go to rescue groups.

In terms of the lack of local adoptions because you live in a rural community where people are supposedly mean to animals, I have said this before, but it rings true here. Too often we set up the problem in such an exaggerated way in order to come up with the only logical outcome to make ourselves feel less responsible for the killing. You have heard many variants of that argument in all the forums: "In our community, the vets won't work with us to offer low-cost spay/neuter" or "In our community, we take in 100 kittens for every 10 we can adopt because of the mindset of our rural population". In this case it's, "We'd like to do more adoptions but... many of the people have a rural mentality that dogs can live chained outside or running with no collar..."

The specifics may be different, but the argument is always that "this" or "that" community is so unlike any other, that either success can't be replicated in your community, or your dilemma is so unique it can't possibly be overcome. In other words, we are not responsible for the killing, because there is nothing we can do about it. Not so.

People go to laundromats, they go to church, they go to stores, they go out to dinner - wherever they go, so should you. Put up posters, put up flyers, bring adoptable animals. If people aren't coming to the shelter, bring the shelter to them! You can do it. You can save the lives at risk regardless of whether you are in a wealthy urban community or a poor one in rural America.

The fact that it is rural has special challenges. That much I'll agree. But remember this: most animals dying in American shelters are being slaughtered in the urban centers, not rural ones, so if there is a problem in America, it most certainly is in the urban core.

Not to say we have got it made in rural America. Hardly. But the challenges of saving lives in rural America are hardly a bar to success (nor are they in metropolitan areas, I might also add). Tompkins is a rural community. And I can't imagine a more pet loving community than this one. Sure, we have our fair share of cruelty and neglect. And it took a state law 150 years in the making to finally force some dog owners who chain their dogs 24/7 to at least put a roof over their heads. But this "rural community" is adopting out older animals, pets missing limbs, pets with special impediments to adoption, and then some. And these critters are sleeping on couches, beds, and being loved the way they deserve.

I went shopping yesterday and ran into a couple who adopted an 8-year-old dog who spent her entire life on a chain. When she came into the shelter, she was so badly matted she needed a complete shave - under sedation! Her name was Jewel and her toenails had grown up and around into her pads. It took a lot to teach her to be a loving housedog. When I ran into them, I asked them about Jewel, to which they corrected me, that her name is no longer Jewel, but "Princess Juliett." And the Princess was doing great, being loved, spending most of her time with them, and sleeping on their bed as we spoke.

Your job is to get the dogs and cats away from those who would neglect them and place them with those who will cherish them. You need to turn a Jewel into Princess Juliett. Don't tell me you can't. If you can't, find someone who will... Because it can and must be done.

And by the way, if you live in a rural community, what is the actual harm in letting dogs run around with no collar? I live in one. My dogs haven't had a collar around their necks since I moved here from the San Francisco Bay Area three years ago. In addition, every morning I get greeted by my neighbor's dogs who run around without a collar. So what? They are happier, healthier, better socialized. In fact, a dog running around without a collar here would barely turn a head. If it ain't downtown Manhattan, a technical violation of your town leash law is hardly a determinant of irresponsible pet ownership.

Making spay/neuter more attractive to fund for grantors and donors

Question from Kathy:

Our organization promotes the fact that we are an all-volunteer, foster home network with no staff/shelter overhead, so contributions go directly to help animals. This helps us enjoy public support and adoptions increase each year as do the number of animals altered through our adoption and community spay/neuter services. I tout spay/neuter as the ultimate rescue, and while people acknowledge the need, most see reducing the population as less tangible than saving a dog or cat's life. When we feature an animal on our web site needing surgery or treatment for a disease, contributions come in even from other states that more than cover the costs. We've had people travel for several hours to then adopt these animals. The response from people to an appeal for spay/neuter funds is not as great.

Last year I applied for a grant to continue our "Litter Patrol" program whereby we contact "free" puppy and kitten ads, yard signs, flyers offering to take the litters into our adoption program and spay/neuter all adult animals remaining in the household. We found people living with generations of animals, and this program is having a huge impact by stopping the breeding cycle.

With the grant proposal accompanied our financial statements, which show the majority of funds for vet bills. During a phone interview regarding the grant, the discussion kept coming up about how much we spend on spay/neuter as opposed to treatment, which is about equal. The grant was denied; the foundation refused to give a reason. Based on the phone conversation, I can't help but feel it's because we treat the sick and injured.

If we stop we lose volunteers and public financial support from the feel-good, from-the-heart donors and fundraisers. If we don't, we lose grant money from foundations that believe in using resources for spay/neuter first. Grant money would step up our spay/neuter efforts, since word of mouth has people contacting us for help even before advertising litters. It's as though (and I know this sounds dramatic) we're being punished for successfully helping treatable dogs and cats through private donors. Now this was one foundation. We did receive a grant for TNR from another, but the denial has diminished a positive outlook for getting grant money.

Since we won't start euthanizing treatable animals, do we stop spending time on grant writing and focus on local fundraising or better yet, are there ways to circumvent this? Your thoughts and suggestions may sort out a very frustrating issue. Thanks.

Response from Nathan:

You may be reading more into this than there is, or maybe you are right about that one granting agency, but I don't think it ultimately matters. There are a lot of granting organizations for spay/neuter. In fact, I would say anecdotally that more animal welfare charities give to spay/neuter than all other programs, maybe even all other programs combined. So keep applying for those and keep up the good work of saving treatables. They are not mutually exclusive and you won't get dinged because of it.

I do agree with you, however, that when it comes to appealing to the public, spay/neuter is less sexy than saving an animal's life through surgery. So you can do a bunch of things in that regard:

1. Sex up spay/neuter. Make your appeals more enticing and more appealing. Asking for spay/neuter because one unspayed female cat can produce 200 billion kittens (or whatever totally exaggerated number folks use) or that not spaying leads to dead pets at shelters is not going to bring in the bucks as much as a friendlier, sexier, humorous, engaging and visual appeal. (Best Friends has a number of interested examples in that regard, check out their website).
2. Focus on general fundraising more and use the money for spay/neuter. My favorite kind of gift is what the bean counters call an unrestricted gift. If you send me a check for \$100 after I send you an appeal saying, "Help us Save Lives," I can use it for spay/neuter if I want to, or whatever else. It is unrestricted. So keep it general. Talk about the dog who needed surgery after being hit by a car. Then mention that when he was all put together, he was vaccinated and then neutered and is now ready for a loving home. Then close by saying, "Help us save lives!" You now have funds for spay/neuter.
3. Also have targeted Funds. We have a fund for everything we do. A medical fund. A spay/neuter fund. A pet food fund. A coffee for the employees fund (helps with productivity at the shelter! A vet tech who has had two good cups of coffee can vaccinate 3x the number of animals in a single day!) You name the fund, we have the fund. People who give to our S/N fund know that 100% of all their donations will go to S/N. People who give to our Medical fund know that 100% of all their donation will go to medical care. We have found that your average gift will be higher, so you can afford to have less overall gifts.
4. This is going to be repetitious from a prior post but also charge a S/N fee with your adoptions. In Tompkins, we charge \$30 for an adoption and \$30 for spay/neuter. We charge the fee regardless of whether the animal is already altered. So if a cat comes in neutered, we still charge the \$30 fee when adopted and we now have a little extra to use for other neutering.

P.S. By the way, your post is a great example of why the No Kill movement has had so much success. This movement is largely based on the fine work of rescue groups who have rejected the status quo and are putting into place the programs and services that save lives, even when larger, better funded shelters in their communities are not as progressive. In Denver, the work of feral cat volunteers and rescue groups doing TNR has reduced intakes and the death rate of shelter cats on their own!

But, while it is certainly laudable that you are doing some great work as an "all-volunteer, foster home network with no staff/shelter overhead," I certainly hope that the shelter in your community with staff and overhead is a partner in your efforts. It does help save a lot of animals, too, without a loss of public support. If they are not, it might be time to start thinking about changing that...

Paying a vet to do our surgeries vs. running our own clinic

Question from Barb:

We have recently opened a small retail-type pet adoption center for rescued pets (mainly cats, because we don't have any type of cat shelter in our rural area). However, our main focus is on spaying/neutering animals - our own prior to adoption as well as pets for low-income people. We currently get this done by transporting the cats and dogs 45-60 miles away one or two days a week to three different vets.

With what we pay to have this done (\$17-29 for cat neuter, \$26-39 for cat spay, and \$45-65 for dog spays) plus the transportation costs, we believe that we could do it cheaper and also do more of it if we had our own clinic staffed by part-time vets. This would also allow us to get the regular medical care for our shelter animals done much cheaper than taking them to local vets. The reason we don't get the S/N's done here is mainly cost - the local vets charge us \$100-125 for a cat spay.

Raising the funds for what we are able to do now has been an ongoing struggle, and coming up with the money to equip a clinic seems like a pipe dream. So we are between a rock and a hard place with barely enough money to get by and do what we already do, but knowing that we could be much more effective if we could open a clinic and really do some S/N numbers, but not having the resources to do it right now. Any suggestions on how we can break through to the next level?

Response from Nathan:

Fundraising requires getting the word out to the community about all the good work you are doing, and then asking for their help. If you can continue to do that, while being strategic in your programs and services, the organization will grow, both in terms of services and financially over time. But you do need a comprehensive fundraising plan.

Each year, we sit down and plan for the following years. When you work out your goals, the programs that will be needed to meet them and then how much they will cost, you will also have to sit down and come up with your fundraising strategy and income sources. How much are you going to bring in for cat adoptions? Boarding fees? Membership? Events? Grants? Our development plan encompasses about 20 pages and it includes details of events, which grants we are applying for, who does what, when and how. When you know what you can do service wise, and how much you expect to bring in, you can plan so you do not get in over your head. Part of that planning should include organizational growth.

While I am not a fan of management-laden organizations, preferring to hire line workers (kennel, adoption staff), the one big exception is a full-time development person, whose job is to bring in the bucks. They should easily bring in more than their salary and their fundraising targets should be set in advance. While being fair (it takes about 1 to 1 1/2 years to get your fundraising plan in motion), if they aren't delivering, you can give them the boot. This will help get you to where you want to be. In addition, you need to recruit Board Members for the express purpose of opening doors and bringing in resources, of a different kind. The staff should raise money for annual giving for programs and services you do today, while your Board helps bring in bigger level gifts to help the organization build an endowment and grow programs over the long term.

One way we raise money for spay/neuter is by fundraising to our members and supporters. We have a separate fund people can donate to specifically for that purpose. I have found that if you give supporters the ability to target their gifts, your average gift and overall dollar intake will be higher. People who give to our S/N fund know that 100% of all their donations will go to S/N. People who give to our Medical fund know that 100% of all their donations will go to medical care. Membership and other general fundraising cover our shelter, food and other expenses, including staff and overhead. Once a year, we do a targeted S/N mailing to all our members. My rule is ask people for membership, send them a newsletter with a return envelope, send them a S/N solicitation, send them a medical care solicitation, send them a food solicitation, and then send them a membership renewal. If it is targeted to a fund, they will give multiple times.

The prices you quote seem to me to be very reasonable. And people forget that running a spay/neuter clinic has a lot of overhead expenses: you need a surgeon and a vet tech, you need spay packs, you need equipment, equipment needs replacement, you need insurance. You might actually find that it is cheaper to use vets than starting your own. We do a combination. We use local vets through vouchers and SPCA transport and we contract with a local provider to come to the SPCA and do the surgery on site. They bring the staff and the equipment. We provide a couple volunteers, the animals, and a check at the end of the day. It works out well. I am not sure we could run our own clinic right now. We are trying. In May, we are finishing a new Pet Adoption Center, which will include a surgery suite, but it will be used by an outside contractor bringing in his own equipment.

Part of your adoption fee should include a S/N fee. Here, we charge \$30 for an adoption and \$30 for spay/neuter. We charge the fee regardless of whether the animal is already altered. So if a cat comes in neutered (it does happen every now and again!), we still charge the \$30 fee when adopted and we now have a little extra to use for ferals or low-income neutering. We had a dog who was adopted and returned 4 times, and each time we charged the spay fee. He was a veritable cash cow in terms of our S/N funding!

There are also foundations who provide grants solely for spay/neuter so make sure you are applying for those. And finally, doing a capital campaign is a different type of fundraising strategy and if you have never done one, you might consider it to raise the funds to build a clinic. (I know there are forums about this that have been done, but there are also a lot of good books on the topic).

I don't know if you charge people a co-pay when doing spay/neuter for low-income households, but you should think about different programs for different populations. This will help defray your costs. Since it costs \$100 to get a cat spayed in your town, you can offer low-income households the ability to do it for \$25. That way, it only costs you a couple of bucks rather than the whole thing. Charge \$20 to neuter a male cat, and you actually pocket a couple of bucks to help pay transportation costs.

We have varying programs some which generate revenue, some which lose revenue, but it all evens out in the end, if you have a coordinated plan. For example,

We charge \$20 for low-income neuters and \$25 for low-income spays. It costs us \$25 to neuter a male cat and \$45 to spay. Our cost is \$5 and \$20. Not bad.

We charge a \$30 S/N fee for adoptions. If the cat is male, since we only paid \$25, we make \$5. If the cat was already neutered, we make the full \$30. If the cat is female, we lose \$15. But if the cat was already spayed, we make the full \$30.

Finally, we do free spays and neuters for ferals and when folks can afford even the co-pays. You just need to assess community need and ability and program specifically for those. In some cases, you'll make a little, in others, you'll lose a little, but with proper planning, you should come out ahead.

How do we choose which animals to rescue-strays or owner surrenders?

Question from Julie:

How do we choose whom to rescue? I ask this because our community coalition is grappling with what will have the greatest impact on pet overpopulation and shelter deaths. We just surveyed our local rescue groups, and about 60% or more of the "rescues" are owner relinquishments, not stray rescues.

One argument is that it does not matter whether you are helping an owner find a new home for a pet or whether you rescue a stray, because they all might end up at the shelter. My opinion is that we get more bang for our efforts by rescuing strays, because they have no one to help them. Whereas owners do have other options than turning the animals in to a shelter or rescue group. However, as time goes by, I am learning that most of my opinions have no basis in fact, and I am trying to be more open minded.

We recognize that all animals are equally deserving of saving, regardless of their source. Our groups are united in the desire to reduce shelter killing as quickly as possible. In terms of rescue selection, how do we focus our scant resources to do that?

Response from Nathan:

I have always felt that a group's primary responsibility was to homeless animals. If you can't do both, your first priority should be those animals most at risk, and those with no home fit the bill. You are absolutely correct that owned animals are at risk for homelessness, but we have come a long way from the thinking that everyone will dump their pet if they do not have the immediate gratification of giving them up on a moment's notice. That is the kind of thinking that has led to the concept that an "open door" shelter is the pinnacle of responsibility, while "limited admission" shelters were shirking their responsibilities by "turning animals away." It is the defense

mechanism that high kill shelters have used to whitewash the fact that their "open door" was little more than an open door to the killing of pets and that rescue groups and private shelters have an important role to play in saving lives. The best summary of the situation I have found came from a letter to the editor in Best Friends magazine in March of 2002.

I don't know the writer, but his words inspire me to this day and they sit above my desk: "I am sick over the fact that we can call an agency to come and 'rescue' a pet - only for the pet to be taken to a 'shelter' and killed. What the heck kind of rescue is that?" If you can't save the pet, you can't save the pet. Private rescue groups should not be in the business of killing animals for others. So you need to prioritize what you can do now, and to put in place a plan to grow your capability in the future, or you will be in a position where you are taking in more animals than you can handle and killing indefinitely.

It is time to accept the fact that we will never reach a one size fits all solution to homelessness. While the fundamental building blocks to No Kill are essentially the same, the actual implementation must vary by community need. I have said this too many times to go into detail here, but suffice to say, you should be flexible and open. For example, for owned animals, you can have varying responses depending on the circumstances. Let's say that your group gets a call from an owner of a dog who is going into a nursing home in 30 days and can't take the dog. The first response can be providing him a pamphlet on finding a home for his dog (Best Friends has one on their website), you might want to post the dog on your website, tell him to place an ad in the paper, go to a breed rescue group first, etc. If he finds a home for the dog, great. If not, you have 30 days to find a foster home or clear up a space in your shelter. You can put owner relinquished pets on a waiting list: explaining that once you take the pet in, you will guarantee that pet a home, but only if they give you time to find a placement. If they threaten to dump the pet or they are moving tomorrow, you can take the pet in right away, but most people will work with you when they here about the alternatives.

It even works with strays. Say someone calls you and says they found a cat or they have been seeing a stray cat in their yard, the cat recently moved in to their house, but they already have cats and don't want another one. Can they do it a little longer? Can you post the cat for adoption on your website but keep the pet in their home? Give people options.

Or, you can do the opposite. You can commit to owner surrendered pets and let the strays go to the shelter. That makes some sense since if someone is looking for their pet, they would most likely go to the shelter. If the pet doesn't get redeemed during the holding period and is at risk for being killed, you can then take the pet at that point, but it does buy you a few days to see if the owner will come forward or the shelter will make a commitment to adopt the animal.

Say in your community, all strays went to animal control. That gives the rescue community the holding period, say three days, before the animals need your help if they weren't redeemed or were not going to be put up for adoption over there. Three days may not sound like much, but it helps. Because if 100 stray dogs go to the shelter, 1/3 are redeemed, 5% are too aggressive for you to handle, 2% are so hopelessly sick or injured that you can't save them, the shelter commits to adopting say another 1/3, you now have 30 dogs to deal with, instead of 100. Again, there is no one size fits all. Be flexible.

My philosophy on community wide efforts is: don't spend scarce resources providing services that others are doing, or can do better. In other words, find the gaps in the safety net of your community and try to fill those. So, if your shelter is taking in strays and doing a good job, you should focus on the owner surrendered animals. Take all the groups in your collaboration and divide and conquer: the breed rescue groups should focus on the breeds, the feral people should take homeless kittens, the other rescues should carve out their own niches, or you can break it out by geography. The whole point is to make sure all the animals at risk have someone to care for them.

This, of course, has one severe limitation and it is unfortunately too common not to comment on. What if the big player in town, the primary animal control shelter, won't participate in your lifesaving efforts? Well, you'll have to work on changing that, either by negotiation, a very public campaign for change, or by legislation such as the 1998 Animal Shelter Law in California which gave rescue groups rights to save animals in shelters. In the meantime, you'll have to work around them, but rescue groups have been successfully doing that for over 100 years.

Using your individual resources to promote rehoming

Question from Katie:

I visit message Boards on a daily basis where people can post about trying to rehome pets. I would love to be more useful in helping these individuals because to me, it is just as worthy to keep a pet out of the shelter system as it is to find a home for one that is already in the shelter system. My question is this... as someone who cannot foster and only volunteers with a rescue (who doesn't take owner give ups), how can I best use my resources to

assist those who are looking to rehome their pets? Also... how can we as the rescue/shelter community promote rehoming over sheltering or dumping??

Response from Nathan:

This is an interesting and underserved issue, which would help reduce shelter intakes.

For one, list-serves and web-based postings are virtually free, except for time management. We now have lots of website adoptions venues for shelters, everything from shelter websites, to Petfinder, to 1-800-Save-A-Pet, to others. If you are Internet savvy, why don't you set up a web site for your community where people looking for homes for their own animals can post a picture, a small blurb and contact information? You can then put out a press release and flyers all over town indicating that this is available, and that people looking to give up or adopt should use the service.

On the Best Friends website is a packet about how to find a home for your pet. You can make that available either through your own organization, on the shelter's website, or on your own website.

You can set up actual post Boards in local supermarkets and other centers of activity where people can put up pictures of their pets needing homes with a blurb and contact information and you can coordinate these. The limitations are only your time, resources and imagination.

But I would also encourage you to work on pet retention programs at the same time. So as much effort as you spend on helping people find homes, spend some time on figuring out why they are giving them up in the first place, and what kind of programs, services, or information they would need to help them keep their pets.

When a shelter relies on "not enough resources" to not take proactive steps

Question from a member:

I have worked with a couple of shelters whose management has come out of the starting gate thinking that the lack of resources is their single greatest impediment to saving lives. That being said, one shelter had a budget of nearly \$1 million, about 30 paid staff and an annual intake of about 4,000 animals. Meanwhile, many other organizations in the same community are saving sick or injured animals with great success. One of these organizations with an operating budget of \$500,000 and 1 full-time and 2 part-time staff members took in more than 1,400 animals each year and routinely treated parvo puppies, hip dysplasia, heartworm, respiratory infections, etc.

Because of the fact that they do invest the time and money to help the most needy animals, this organization is easily able to appeal to the public to raise the funds. To me, it seems as though the turning point for any animal protection organization to save more lives is when its management stops relying on the age-old, defeatist argument of "not enough resources" and instead takes a more proactive approach, stepping out to find the resources that are there. But, affecting this change in mindset within an organization is not an easy task. How can we help the shelter leadership understand that it is not so much a question of the limited resources you have, but rather how you chose to use them that ultimately leads to success?

Response from Nathan:

OK, you nailed it, but you asked the wrong person. I will try to answer your question, but first the disclaimers and waivers:

Warning. Read at Your Own Risk. I am a No-Kill Calvinist. I believe that character is fixed at birth, or at least mostly fixed, but hardens to an impenetrable core by say age 3. If the leadership of your shelter is killing animals and doesn't believe they can do much, it is hard for me to believe you can change their mind with some facts and figures. But I have been wrong before. Admittedly, I have seen shelter Directors opposed to TNR embrace it. But that is the exception, and not the rule. So read my answer with a good dose of healthy skepticism. I do believe there are three steps in the process you seek: 1. negotiate, 2. battle, 3. rebuild, but I am a hawk, not a dove. I will give you a paragraph on negotiation and 20 or so on battling. I am from the Donald Rumsfeld School of No-Kill. So your best bet is to ask this mighty worthy question to someone of more patience and, uh...worthiness?

OK, that out of the way,

Your most excellent post is the key challenge for our movement in the next decade. It is, I would add, a challenge we will overcome, no doubt about it. Even the most vocal stalwarts of the status quo are adopting change - albeit kicking and screaming - or, better yet, retiring. As the dinosaurs of this movement move on, die off, or sink into a tarry pit of oblivion, a new leadership will reject the outdated concepts of the past. Concepts like "too many animals, not enough homes," "the best we can do for these animals is a humane death," and my personal favorite: "Euthanasia that is performed by caring, skilled professionals may be the only way to ensure that feral cats have a

peaceful release from an uncaring, dangerous world that is likely to doom them to short lives and tragic deaths." What a load of garbage. But that is the status quo. You are battling 150 years of inertia and defeatism, so it is going to take some time. But the tide is definitely on your side.

What makes the \$500K/year organization you describe so successful while the \$1M/year one not? Leadership. The \$500k/year organization has a strong leader willing to do what it takes. That is great, but we need more as a movement.

Right now, No-Kill is leadership based whereas traditional sheltering is institutionalized. What I mean by that is that the success of an organization's No Kill policies depends on the will and vision of its leader. When that leader leaves the organization, the vision can quickly be doomed. It is why an SPCA can be cutting edge one day, and a lumbering giant going nowhere the next.

That is why it is important for organizations to build a culture of lifesaving and have enough depth on its Board, as well as its staff and volunteer base so it doesn't go backward - and to implant that thinking in the community. So the organization's head can come and go, but the Board, the staff, the volunteers, the community keep the shelter on its lifesaving track. Our challenge for individual shelters and for No-Kill as a whole is to move past personalities (Winograd who? Avanzino who? Boks who? Robinson who? Mountain who? Arms who? etc.) and institutionalize No-Kill. That is going to take some time. Contrast that with the traditional way of thinking, which is so deeply ingrained in some communities that leaders come and leaders go, and the programs and services stay the same: lots of grandstanding about how much we value animals, lots of fundraising for this program or that program, and unfortunately, lots of killing. If we can institutionalize No-Kill, we will be successful. We want to get to a point where leaders come and leaders go, but the lifesaving continues.

You need to be in this for the long haul. But there are three basic steps:

1. You always start with education and diplomacy.
2. When that fails, you go for regime change. Regime change isn't all that hard (it might take time, but it isn't difficult). Just ask the President of the U.S.
3. What is more challenging is Nation Building. You need to create the institutions of lifesaving, regardless of whether you are talking about the Nation of Iraq or a No Kill Nation. That's what separates a politician from a statesman - and differentiates a movement of personalities from a movement of lasting change.

Our success will depend on whether No-Kill can move from regime change to nation building, from personalities to institutions. So go down the three steps: 1. educate and negotiate. If that fails, 2. regime change. When that is done, 3. build a culture of life-saving.

1. Educate & Negotiate: Negotiating and educating for change requires a lot of diplomacy, of dancing, and of who is doing the presentation. Your job is to convince animal control to embrace No Kill. That might require a public campaign. But before you go there, keep in mind that with the rising tide of No Kill, many animal control Directors feel under seize. And so it may prove beneficial not only to send the right message, but also to send the right MESSENGER. Don't criticize. Demonstrate how certain programs and services have had success elsewhere and how you are willing to help implement those here. There is good information and good literature all over the Best Friends website. Put together a packet and ask for a meeting. Ask what you can do to help? You might need to be patient.

2. Regime Change: You may find that the current leadership is not interested in change. You might find that the leader talks a good game, and will string you along, but won't implement the needed programs and services. At that point, you might consider a public campaign either to force the shelter to implement them, or to change the leadership. If the organization is a member-organization, you are a shareholder and can force some issues. A "member organization" does not mean you send in \$35 and you are a "member." It could mean that, but not necessarily. You need to check the organization's bylaws. If they have members and they are required to have an annual meeting of members to vote on the slate of officers, approve minutes and changes, you can become a member and then make it an issue then, the way stockholders at Disney are dealing with Michael Eisner. You can also force change through publicity.

I will post the following from a prior forum I did which was along the same lines: You want to keep the issue in the public eye, by issuing a periodic report card of how the shelter is doing for the media. If there is documentation, break it up into areas of adoptions vs. other similarly situated communities, etc. Say, every two or three months, put out an interim report: has anything changed in those key areas? How many animals have died since then? Include in the report recommendations of changes that should be implemented. Send a copy to the Director.

These reports should come from an organization. It doesn't have to be a 501(c)(3), but put together a group. Elect officers, meet regularly, give yourselves a name, use letterhead stationary, and keep the issue before the public. Once you issue your report, send it to the media, to the chamber of commerce, to the city council, to the shelter Director, to the governor, to your local and state representatives, to county judges, to the district attorney, to local

big wigs. No silly cc'd unprofessional lists of one hundred people, just a nice clean copy to all the players in your community.

You then want to approach your city council or the Board of Directors and provide them with the roadmap. Two or three pages (not a 100 page novel) of initial steps to get the shelter on track with lifesaving by proposing measurable, cost-effective changes that the shelter can do. Foster care is a low- to no-cost way of saving lives. It doesn't cost the shelter anything (foster parents pay for food and litter) while expanding the lifesaving capacity. It costs \$100 to kill an animal and dispose of the body. If you adopt the animal instead, you get an adoption fee, a spay/neuter fee, and a happy customer whom you can solicit for membership six months later. It is cost-effective to save lives. Killing animals is a waste of money. If rescue groups are willing to take animals, that is a way of shifting the cost of care from the taxpayers to private individuals. Play up the economic aspects of this "public-private partnership". Shelters rely on good public image, and keeping the issue hot in the media continues the pressure to change.

At all times, the report and your conduct must be thoughtful, objective, and rational. Coats and ties, business suits, are mandatory for public meetings. You are professionals. I don't mean to patronize anyone, but too often I have seen an important message get lost because the messenger is unprofessional. There is absolutely no excuse for failing to show up in a coat and tie or business suit, of being professional, of arguing your case passionately but professionally. All it does is harm your credibility and results in your dismissal as a "radical".

Regime change has, or will have, good success in places as diverse as Atlanta, Washington DC, NYC, Los Angeles and others!

What may prove more challenging is No. 3.

3. Institutionalizing No-Kill. Once you have the organization going in your direction, you need to institutionalize the programs and services and the culture of lifesaving. Which means keeping volunteers, staff, the Board and the community apprised of all the organization is doing, and making sure what the shelter is doing (statistics, decision making) is readily accessible to the public. That means there are public forums so that a new leader can't backtrack without scrutiny. It means energizing and empowering everyone from feral cat groups to breed rescue groups, and putting them all on the lifesaving trek. It is happening in NYC! It will hopefully happen in Los Angeles! And it is has had - and will soon have - good success in other places as well.

Good luck.

Convincing management that starting new programs can save money

Question from Jean:

We know that adding on programs like fosters, spay/neuter before adoption, and off-site adoption sites are going to be more cost effective in the long run for our shelter and also create more public awareness/support. Yet, we are a municipal shelter and our commissioners only see the money that will need to be spent up front. They say that in the budget crunch they can't possibly give us funding to start these programs. So we feel like we are shut down before even getting started. How can we work around this?

Response from Nathan:

Well, since the Bush-Cheney stimulus package seems not to be making communities flush with cash as promised, we need to find other ways to make up the revenue shortfalls caused by irresponsible economic policies by the federal and state government. Your situation is not unique as many communities are finding themselves strapped for funding, particularly in light of increasing mandates from states to localities that are not being reimbursed. So your job is to find other sources of revenue. One way to find alternative sources of funding is to create a separate organization that is an IRS Code 501(c)(3) not-for-profit which can actually fundraise. These are typically called "Friends of the County Animal Shelter" and they are independent from the municipal shelter but raise money for its programs. This is a strategy used by a fair number of municipal shelters to make up shortfalls in their budget and program priorities. It is a strategy that has proved successful for cash-strapped public libraries for many years. With one large caveat: some counties will reduce the amount taken out of the general fund since the shelter now has other funding. You cannot allow that to happen. So keep commissioners and bureaucrats out of the process and make it a truly independent agency. For us Californians, the best example is the lottery and how it was going to save our schools. All the legislature did was reduce general fund contributions by lottery intakes and schools were no better off. Be careful.

Having said that, you are correct that these programs are cost-effective in the long run, but they are as well from the get go. Foster care programs and off-site adoptions can be implemented with no money down and no interest until.... well, until forever. And then you can grow the program as your Friends of the County Animal Shelter begin to bring in additional funding. Foster care programs shift the cost of care from the agency to private individuals. In

the parlance of republican government, they are an excellent example of a public-private partnership. Once the animal goes into foster care, the foster parent pays for food, litter, all the incidentals. It costs you nothing. All you need is an excel spreadsheet and a volunteer to coordinate. We fostered almost 900 animals last year (one out of every three that we placed) with a part-time volunteer, a clipBoard, and excel. Plus, you get the adoption fee so it is potentially revenue generating. (A packet on how to build a cost-effective IN THE SHORT TERM is available on the Best Friends website under No More Homeless Pets, Model Programs, Tompkins County SPCA). The same is true of off-site programs. Ours are all volunteer run. It costs me nothing but the one sheet of paper I print the press release on).

Spay/Neuter before adoption is a little trickier but can be done. I am going to over-simplify the budget for an example, but it will get the point across. We charge adopters of our puppies the FULL cost of the spay/neuter. For puppies, our expense on pre-release sterilization is zero. All puppies are sterilized and we don't spend a dime. For male cats, we charge \$30 but pay \$25. Pre-release sterilization of our male costs actually makes us money. We make \$5 per cat. Assuming 50% are males and we adopt out about 2,000 cats per year, neutering male cats can potentially make us \$5,000 a year. How about that for cost-effective? Females cost us \$45 to spay, and we only charge \$30, so we potentially lose \$15 per cat. If you count the profit from the males, it is really \$10 per cat. So how do we make up the difference (part of it is fundraising which you can do with the Friends group)? We charge the spay/neuter fee even if the animal already comes in altered. That way you make the full \$30 as profit. Over the year, it tends to even out.

Don't feel shut down before you even get started. You are only limited by your own creativity. Last year, when we finished the year saving 100% of healthy and treatable pets and had a death rate that was over eight times lower than the national average, I got a nice e-mail from a volunteer who thanked me for all my hard work. To which, I truthfully responded that it was less hard work, than being an S.O.B. who refuses to take No for an answer. The No Kill movement is a movement about making things happen. Traditional sheltering is based on the defeatist attitude that it can't be done. Remember this if nothing else: if someone closes a door, find another. If they close that one, crawl in through a window. If they seal it up, smash the damn thing. Get inside to where you want to be. No Kill can be summarized in one sentence: "What must be done, Will be done." Leave the nay saying for the dinosaurs whose time is almost up.

Expanding services to the public

Question from a member:

I work at a shelter that wants to expand our services to the public. We do a good job of placing the animals that enter our shelter and neutering before adoption. However, we don't have any outreach programs like a TNR program or behavioral help or a public spay/neuter program. So given that our financial and volunteer resources are tight, how do we determine which area to focus on first? All would help with our intake and our relationship with the community, so how do you choose which program is most crucial to our efforts to undertake?

Response from Nathan:

It depends on community need. In the old days, shelters were fond of saying that X numbers of animals were killed last year, so we need people to be more responsible, or we need mandatory spay/neuter, or we need this or we need that. But they never took the time to break out the categories of animals who were being killed, so that they could align solutions to deliver results. Instead of making headway, they were spinning their wheels. The net result has been 150 years of killing animals, above and beyond where we can and should be.

Let me give you the example. Let's say you live in Anytown, USA. Your community shelters are killing 5,000 animals per year and you want to reduce that. Should you start a TNR program? Should you open the shelter on weekends to do more adoptions? What should you do? The number, 5,000, doesn't tell you anything in and of itself.

It really depends on who is dying. If you actually crunch your numbers and categorize them, you can answer that question. So say, for example, of those 5,000:

- 2,000 are feral cats.
- 1,500 are dog with behavior problems.
- 1,000 are under aged kittens and puppies.
- 500 are sick or injured animals.

Now we know something. We know that to save the 2,000 feral cats, staying open on weekends to do more adoptions won't help. We need a TNR program. For the 1,500 behavior dogs, we need dog behavior and rehabilitation. For the 1,000 under aged kittens and puppies, we need a public spay/neuter program and a foster care program for the shelter. And for the 500 sick or injured animals, we need medical intervention programs.

So, if you can't do them all, you can at least prioritize them in terms of greatest need and which will reduce your death rate the most. And then when you get success at that, you can turn to the community to help fund the next area. In this scenario, say you can only do one of these. If you did a TNR program, you potentially save 2,000 animals whereas if you were doing medical intervention, you could only save 500. But you wouldn't have known that if you didn't break the animals at risk out into categories.

Now here's the rub. When you break them out, you are likely to find that you can actually do more than you thought. Let's say you have \$50,000 to work with and you want to maximize the number of lives that money impacts. Without the above analysis, you might put all \$50,000 into public spay/neuter, when the reality is you only need 1/2 of that based on your assessment. You also know that foster programs are revenue-neutral or revenue-generating (see my handout on the Best Friends website) so you might cut that back some more, which will allow you to spend some money on medical intervention too. Or you might find that you can do all of them or modify the programs to fit the need.

In yesterday's post, I encouraged people to charge co-pays for low-income spay/neuter in cases where people were willing and able to do it. The question posed indicated that it cost \$100 in a community to spay a cat, but that a veterinarian charged the shelter \$30. Instead of paying for it all, you could charge the public say all \$30 or say \$20. Now it only costs you \$10 per animal and you could do three times as many or use the extra funds for ownerless feral cats - and, in the process, you have a small but growing TNR program.

In terms of behavior programs, you could also start out smaller. Rather than hire someone, you could use volunteers. Do you have dog fanciers in your community who could give advice to the public? Or one of your dog foster parents who has no formal training but lots of experience? Can you use stuff from other organizations and offer fact sheets for free? If you look on our website at www.SPCAonline.com under Dog information, you will find at least a dozen fact sheets on everything from barking to working with fearful dogs. Under cats, everything from resolving litterbox problems to keeping pets out of your neighbor's yard. If they are helpful to you, download them. Everywhere it says "Tompkins County SPCA" put in "Your Shelter or Group's Name" and now you have a free web-based behavior advice service. (Everyone has my permission to use anything on our website as their own.)

A toast from Nathan to celebrate our achievements and continue our quest

Dear Friends,

Today is April 1. In my humble view, it is one of the most important days in the history of animal sheltering, right up there with the day Henry Bergh founded the first SPCA in North America. Ten years ago today, after months of negotiation, Richard Avanzino, then President of the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals signed the Adoption "Pact", a memorandum of understanding between the the SPCA and the city shelter that guaranteed a home for every healthy dog and cat in San Francisco. Each and every healthy dog and cat who entered the city's pound would be saved - no matter how many there were or how long it took.

And what virtually every animal shelter in the country kept saying was an impossibility became a reality for the fourth largest city in the country's most populous state. After the first year of the Adoption Pact, the deaths of healthy animals in San Francisco shelters dropped to zero, and the deaths of sick and injured animals dropped by close to 50%. But the real treasure for San Francisco dogs and cats was the formalization of an adoption agreement that saved the lives of 2,500 additional animals every year that the city shelter could not place - effectively putting them on death row without Avanzino's intervention. With a huge groundswell of support, Avanzino took an SPCA on the verge of bankruptcy in a city that took in over 20,000 animals per year, most of whom were killed, and turned it into the safest urban community for homeless pets in the United States. And for other communities with an eye toward San Francisco, what was thought impossible, become possible, and what was possible came to be.

And it is my hope that some day, we celebrate No-Kill day the way our country celebrates other seminal events in our nation's history, because I truly believe what we are doing here is every bit as noble and worthy in our human march to growing compassion as any movements that have come before.

I hope you take a little time today to reflect on what we are doing, and join me for a nation-wide toast to how far we have come. 4.5 million critters who will face death in shelters every year depend on us. And thanks to what transpired 10 years ago, I have every faith that, as we continue our noble quest, we will not let them down.

Knowing which fundraisers to do and which are more effort than they are worth

Question from Melanie:

We get a lot of volunteers and donors coming to us with suggestions for fundraisers or events they think we should do. A lot of these are great ideas, but we just don't have the staff and time to do every one, especially when some of them take more time and effort than they bring in.

The volunteers don't seem to understand that though and feel like we are being ungrateful for their help and obviously don't need the money. But it's often that they suggested we come to a craft fair they are involved in and set up a booth to solicit donations - and then we get like \$20 but spent 4 hours there. And of course they don't want to do the fundraiser because they feel like they are helping by letting us know about the opportunity.

How can we determine if a fundraiser is going to be more time and energy than it is worth and let our supporters know this in a nice way that keeps them involved and not upset that we aren't doing it?

Response from Nathan:

There are different avenues for this one, and some combination is probably the best for each group or shelter which faces this situation. First of all, fundraising is an integral part of every organization. I think it is very important that you have your annual fundraising plan in place prior to the start of the fiscal year. Our fiscal year parallels the calendar year (Jan-Dec). By October, I know what we are doing Jan, Feb, Mar, April, May, June, July, Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov, and Dec of the following in terms of newsletters, solicitations, events, and appeals. No group, no matter how big or how small, should leave fundraising to chance. I get a lot of ribbing from my colleagues because my view to lifesaving is "save lives first, and ask questions second."

But when it comes to where the bucks are coming from, I do not like to leave things to chance. Sit down and set up a development plan in advance. When a volunteer offers a suggestion, you can truthfully respond that you will follow-up with your development team but cannot promise anything because your development plan is set out a year in advance. If you can't do it this year, you'll consider it for next year's hopper. Secondly, and in limitation of the first, when you are out there saving lives, engaging your volunteers and lifting the sights of the community, you will get a lot of these. Don't reject them all. You need to stay open for opportunities. Some will bring in \$20, others \$200, still others \$2,000.

Be flexible - and expand on the suggestion. Spending four hours at a craft fair for \$20 may not sound cost-effective if you are sending staff who are making \$10 an hour. But what if you are sending volunteers? Or, if it must be staff, why not bring literature and a sign up sheet to recruit other volunteers and foster parents? How about bringing animals for adoption? So, if you only make \$20 but adopt out a couple of cats in the process, it may actually be a good use of time and resources.

Finally, when you recruit volunteers, is it a free for all? Come pet the animals when you want? Or come pet the animals Monday, Wed, and Fri? Or should you be more targeted to fit the need of your organization? When we recruit and place volunteers within our organization, we ask for specific needs to be filled: 1. dog walkers, 2. cat socializers, 3. office support, 4. post-adoption callbacks, 5. off site adoption and special events, 6. website support, etc. Then we plug them into a schedule, so volunteers have to come every week on their specific shift, say Wed at 2:30 to 5:30. They have to call in sick, etc. if they can't make it. Absenteeism leads to firing. And we plug someone else in. That way, we can help make sure all the cats get played with, the dogs get walked, and that we have support when these events come up.

Our goal is to have volunteers in the shelter every minute of every day we are open. So, if a volunteer or someone else says that there is a fair next weekend, can we bring animals for adoption, literature, etc, I have a ready core of able volunteers to fit the bill. I can call upon the special events and offsite adoption team to be ready, and they bring the donation jar with them.

Making your programs accountable

Question from Amanda:

We do a lot of different programs that we feel are very important. We have a voucher program for spay/neuter, obedience classes for anyone adopting from us, taking pets into nursing homes, and humane ed. However, we don't know how to measure results to see if these programs are worth the staff and volunteer time, effort, and energy that goes into them. I know some things can be intangible and still having an impact, but that doesn't work for our Board when they ask us to prove these programs are worthwhile. How do you measure your programs to know if they are actually making a difference and if you should continue them?

Response from Nathan:

The primary difference between for profit and non-profit organizations is not the mission, is not the quality of the people who work in them, is not a different principle of doing business. It is, quite simply, accountability. Non-profits, at least many shelters don't seem to aspire to any. The CEO of a for profit business that failed to meet his

bottom line would not survive, nor would the business. In the non-profit world, however, very few CEOs feel they need to be accountable to the public for their mission. They could merely decry the "sad state of affairs" and continue to ask for money without ever being required to get results. "Look," they are fond of saying, "how many children we visited this year under our humane education program," despite an ever increasing body count as the animals continue to be killed.

So your question is inspiring in that you seek to make the shelter accountable. To do that, you need to focus on the bottom line, like a for-profit enterprise would. For me, the bottom line is how many animals the shelter saves. You should have one primary goal: reducing the number of animals that are being killed. And to do that, you need to do two primary things: adopt more animals and lower the number of animals surrendered to the shelter.

When you are looking at your programs and services, you need to make sure they have measurable, life-saving results. There is too much to do, and unless you are flush with cash, too little money (at least at first!) to spend it on "intangibles." First on the chopping block should be those programs and services that are merely duplicative. If there are 20 other obedience classes in your community, why do you need one of your own, if you are concerned about cost. With every adoption we do, we give people a list of available classes. We also list them on our website. In return for the free advertising, many of them offer discounts if the pet is adopted from the shelter. No cost to us (except paper), and we don't have to offer the program. I said this earlier, look for the gaps in the safety net and fill those.

Second, figure out if the programs are paying off in some way. Not all results have to be direct, but they have to be tangible. For example, under Avanzino, the San Francisco SPCA had a program to train hearing dogs for the deaf or hearing impaired. It was a noble program, but I couldn't see why we should focus on that since there were other groups like Canine Companions for Independence who were doing the job of matching service dogs with individuals who needed them. But, alas, I was young, impetuous, hotheaded, shortsighted and foolish (I am proud to say that I am no longer any of those things, except the young part.) I was informed by a wiser man than I, that not only was the hearing dog program taking dogs out of pounds were they were on death row (and hence we were saving them). And, the revenue brought in was greater than the cost of the program and the extra was being used to subsidize other lifesaving programs at the shelter. So while my focus was on reducing the death rate in San Francisco shelters, we obviously needed money to do that, and this program - in a small way, directly by saving dogs from pounds, but in a greater way, indirectly by providing cash - did that. Direct or indirect, it was tangible.

Going into nursing homes and humane education are nice programs, but I believe they are people programs. In other words, I am not convinced they help animals, either directly by saving lives or making people keep or neuter their pets with any degree of measurability, or indirectly, by providing needed revenue streams.

Unless they are revenue generating (directly by payment for services offsetting costs, or bringing in donations), frankly the benefits are too intangible to have any meaning for an organization struggling with resource allocation issues for saving lives. In communities nationwide, shelter employees, often with dogs and cats in tow, enter classroom after classroom across the nation where overworked teachers needing a break met them with relief, and wide-eyed school children petted animals while grinning from ear to ear.

Meanwhile, generations of shelter Directors boasted to their constituents about the number of school children they were reaching with their humane message and promising that the light at the end of the tunnel, the mythical place where animals were loved and had lifetime homes, was as close as the emancipation of these kids. It was, and remains, a lovely thought.

But this effort was never challenged to see if it could actually get results. In fact, no shelter Director - not a single one - could point to any: Were more animals being sterilized because of these efforts? Were people keeping their pets longer? Was the death rate at the shelter declining because of it? Would these children grow up to be more responsible pet owners? No one had any answers. Despite tight budgets and cuts in the areas of animal care, shelters continued to send legions of staff members into classrooms without any proof that it has, was having, or ever hoped to have an impact whatsoever on the death rate in shelters. Over twenty years of humane education has yet to produce a single study showing it has made any bit of difference. I am, in short, no fan of this program.

Finally, break down your programs and services into: short-term impact, medium-term impact, and long-term impact. Your primary focus should be on saving the most animals today. So the bulk of your resource allocation should be to those: adoption, foster, TNR, pre-release sterilization, etc. A good chunk on reducing numbers over time: spay/neuter for low-income pet owners (you are not simply going to adopt your way to No-Kill). And finally, over the long-term: building an endowment for the future and more spay/neuter. Some people say Humane Ed falls into the latter, but I haven't seen the results. And when it comes to saving lives, accountability is this key. If, when all is said and done, all you have are platitudes: "children are our future," "we must educate future generations to be responsible pet owners," you'll be spinning your wheels forever. In short, show me the money.

Nathan's closing remarks

I want to close by offering, as a point of departure from the status quo, the immortal words of the poet Robert Frost:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

As you go forward in your lifesaving efforts, I encourage you to continue to resist and challenge the "it's not our fault" mentality of shelter administrators who have utterly failed to find ways to reduce the killing. I encourage you to take the road less traveled by. The definition of "insanity" is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. If the status quo has not ended the wholesale slaughter of millions of animals in shelters for the last 150 years, why should anyone think it will do so going forward? But while No Kill looks to the future, it is also fulfilling a promise put in place over a century ago. Henry Bergh didn't start the first SPCA in North America in order to provide a vehicle to kill unwanted animals. He was trying for something else.

In early 1866, Henry Bergh returned to his native New York City, a city now filled with a million residents, and discovered, on every street, in every corner, as part of virtually every industry, an overcrowded city built upon the suffering of animals, crying out for reform. On February 8, to a well-filled room of attendees, Henry Bergh delivered the first lecture on animal protection in the United States. "This is a matter purely of conscience," said Bergh. "It has no perplexing side issues. It is a solemn recognition of that greatest attribute of the Almighty Ruler of the universe - mercy." One hundred signatories came forward and signed Bergh's Declaration of the Rights of Animals, pledging themselves to suppressing cruelty and showing mercy.

Armed with the Declaration, Henry Bergh secured a charter from the State of New York creating the country's first SPCA. Nine days later, the state passed a new law prohibiting cruelty to animals, and the fledgling SPCA was given the power to enforce that law. Henry Bergh went to war. Bergh would spend the better part of the next two decades in a daily struggle for the animals in and around New York. Like many cities throughout the world, stray dogs were commonplace in Henry Bergh's time. Every year for a 90-day period beginning in June, the New York City pound opened its doors to clean up the streets of stray dogs with the help of local boys. The payment of 50 cents for each dog brought to the pound provided men and boys with a profitable trade in dogs. It didn't matter if they were stray or not, dogs were rounded up off the street, from yards, from people's arms.

He succeeded in reducing the number of dogs killed from 5,825 to 938 in one year. He stopped the City from killing dogs because of an unsubstantiated rabies scare. And when New York City officials attempted to crack down on dogs by proposing a law requiring all dogs to be muzzled in public, Bergh fought them every step of the way. Because of intense SPCA opposition, the proposed muzzling law failed to pass. And in one year alone the ASPCA prosecuted twelve cases of cruelty by city dogcatchers. Bergh was having a profound impact on saving lives.

In a very short period of time, states and territories across America had used the SPCA as a model for their own, independent humane societies and the numbers continued to grow. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, virtually every major city in the United States had an SPCA or humane society.

Of Bergh, the poet Longfellow once wrote:

Among the noblest of the land,
Though he may count himself the least,
That man I honor and revere,
Who, without favor, without fear,
In the great city dares to stand
The friend of every friendless beast.

Following his death, however, Bergh's SPCA took over for city dogcatchers, accepting the role that Bergh would not take throughout his life. By 1910, the ASPCA was taking in hundreds of thousands of dogs and cats per year on behalf of the government, with all but a small percentage put to death. Other SPCAs fell in tow. Within a decade or two, most mainstream humane societies and SPCAs did little more than kill dogs and cats. "We keep all dogs we receive, unless very sick or vicious, five days;" noted one such SPCA, "then those unclaimed are humanely put

to death except a limited number of desirable ones for which we can find good homes. We keep from twenty to thirty of the best of the cats and kittens to place in homes and the rest are put to death... We do not keep a large number of animals alive..."

It would have hurt Henry Bergh very deeply. The SPCA Bergh had set up to save the life of animals was being used as a tool to kill them. As a society, as a movement, as a compassionate people, we lost our path. It is time to recapture our roots. And that is exactly what the No-Kill movement is trying to do. And, as a movement, we are closer today to realizing the hopes and dreams and ambitions of Henry Bergh than at any time in our history.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and WE--
We took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

We are fulfilling the promise put in place by Henry Bergh over a century ago. And everyone. Every city, every county, every community that has made the decision to save lives is going to bring about the day when we end the killing of homeless pets. From the Brooklyn to the Golden Gate Bridge, we are laying the foundations for a No-Kill nation. When the history of the No-Kill movement is written, the world will know one undeniable truth: your efforts, my efforts, the efforts of every rescue group and feral cat caretaker, our combined efforts will have helped pave the way.

And we will do it, by staying flexible, by innovating, by turning and twisting with whatever obstacles and challenges in front of us. If we stay focused on the animals, and when and how they need us, nothing will stand in our way. For try as the nay sayers might, "you cannot fight against the future. Time is on our side... and the banner which we now carry in this fight will be borne by the hands of united people, perhaps not to an easy, but to a certain and not to distant victory." (William Gladstone, 1866.)

-- Nathan

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