

The No Kill Revolution Starts with **YOU**



**Reforming Animal
Control In Your
Community Through
Effective Political
Advocacy**

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ARM YOURSELF

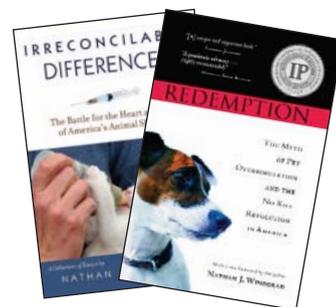
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Rescue Five-O is grateful to **Ryan Clinton**, founder of FixAustin.org, for authoring this guide. Clinton is an appellate attorney at Hankinson Levinger LLP (HankLev.com). He has six times been named one of the best attorneys in Texas and was a 2009 recipient of the No Kill Advocacy Center's Henry Bergh Leadership Award for his advocacy efforts on behalf of companion animals.

The No Kill Revolution Starts with **YOU**

**Reforming Animal Control In
Your Community Through
Effective Political Advocacy**

It is a story as old as our movement. The shelter in your community is killing large numbers of animals, the quality of care in the shelter is low, and the bureaucracy that oversees the shelter appears indifferent. A group of advocates wants the shelter to stop the needless killing and to start treating the animals as they deserve. But everywhere they turn—to the City Council or County Commissioners, to the media, to the large national organizations like the ASPCA or Humane Society of the United States—leads to nowhere. They get excuses, “It’s pet overpopulation,” “It’s the public’s fault,” “There is nothing we can do.” But someone has to do something, you think. That someone is you.

There was a time when Austin’s municipal animal shelter was a very dangerous place for lost and homeless pets. In 2005, the shelter put to death 14,304 animals. That’s almost 40 dogs and cats killed every single day of the year. The shelter director at the time had no interest in increasing the number of animals leaving the shelter alive and opposed common-sense alternatives to killing,

There was a time when Austin’s municipal animal shelter was a very dangerous place for lost and homeless pets. In 2005, the shelter put to death 14,304 animals. But those days are no more—a bygone era of a tragic past.

such as a foster program and offsite adoptions. In other words, Austin was a typical animal control shelter that killed more animals than it saved. And there was no internal desire to change, except for lip-service to a mythical time in the future when they would not have to kill because the “irresponsible public” would have become responsible.

All told, the then-director of the shelter killed over 100,000 animals during her tenure. And she did so after refusing to implement common-sense alternatives to killing. She refused to stop killing even after a state inspection report noted that the shelter routinely had hundreds of empty cages. She argued to the press that she did not have time to focus on adop-



tions, did not want to do offsite adoptions, did not trust the public enough to foster kittens.

Worse still, a failed late-1990s campaign to become a “No Kill” city was forgotten, invisible even in the rear-view mirrors of animal advocates and policy makers. And some who were advocates for change in the 1990s learned the wrong lesson from their failed effort: instead of researching and advocating for proven lifesaving programs to reduce Austin’s shelter killing (programs they had not

demand in the late 1990s), they abandoned hope and became entrenched in an effort to defend the status quo they subsequently joined. For example, after resigning from the Austin Humane Society in the late 1990s, the then-Executive Director of the organization switched sides and led an ASPCA-sponsored effort *against* shelter reform in 2007. Even as the shelter director was killing well over a thousand animals each month, the ASPCA was publicly backing that director, opposing reasonable reforms, defending the killing, attacking advocates, and blaming the animals themselves for their own fate. In their own words: “The problem is not getting adopters to the shelter, but rather, having enough desirable and placeable animals to choose from.”

There was no foster care program, no offsite adoption program, no progressive director, no “No Kill Equation.” There were just a lot of excuses and a lot of killing—14,304 animals in one year alone. But those days are no more—a bygone era of a tragic past.

Today, more dog and cats are leaving Austin’s shelter alive than at any time in its history; roughly nine out of ten are going out the front door in the loving arms of families. A successful reform effort led by animal-welfare advocates succeeded despite heavy opposition from the former shelter manager, the local humane society, some policymakers, and the ASPCA. How it happened is a lesson for other communities whose pounds and shelters are overseen by regressive directors—communities in which No Kill advocates must fight not only institutional inertia and uncaring within health departments, police departments, or other bureaucratic agencies of government, but also the large national organizations—like the ASPCA—that inexplicably and indefensibly want the old-guard, high-killing paradigm to continue.

Austin’s success was not the result of “community collaboration,” as others have suggested. It was the result of a fight. A fight against the powers-that-be. A fight against indecency and uncaring that took place every time an animal was injected with poison from a bottle marked “Fatal-plus.” It was also a fight over community values and priorities, and it was a fight for access to the animals that the shelter wrongly deemed “unadoptable” and “unwanted.”

How Austin went from a community that killed over 14,000 animals a year to a fraction of that provides a road-map for your community. How they did it is how you can do it, too.

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STEP ONE

ARM YOURSELF

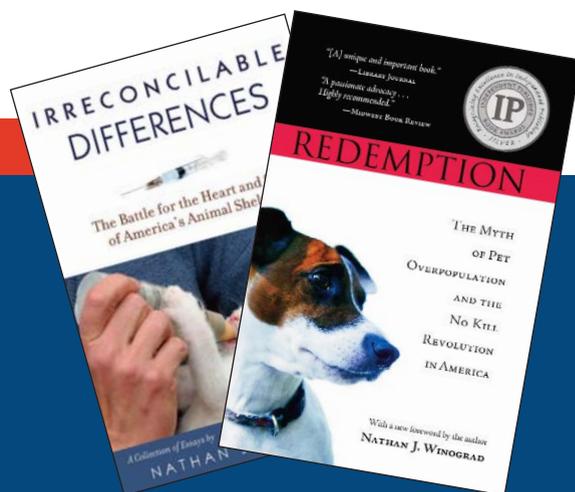
Nothing happens without leadership. Achieving No Kill success in your community depends on individuals willing to take on the difficult task of fighting for change. But do not go looking for “someone to do something.” That “someone” is you. In Austin, a handful of people with busy, hectic lives including full-time jobs, companion animals, relationships, and more, fought for a No Kill Austin and ultimately prevailed. You can do it, too.

Do Your Homework

The first step in your advocacy efforts is to prepare yourself for the battle ahead: do your homework and get to know the No Kill movement. Familiarize yourself with the programs and services of the “No Kill Equation.” This is the only model that has successfully created a No Kill community, and it is a model that has also been replicated in multiple cities across the country with the same successful results. The programs of the No Kill Equation are basic, common-sense policies to replace killing that even the staunchest No Kill opponents have trouble countering.

But it isn’t enough for a shelter to have each of these programs and policies. No Kill is only achieved when they are rigorously and comprehensively implemented so that they replace killing entirely. All neonatal kittens and puppies, for example, should be sent into foster care; not just some of them.

Thankfully, there are now No Kill communities in California, New York, Kentucky, Virginia, Michigan, and elsewhere. Familiarize yourself with them, such as Washoe County (Reno), Nevada. In Reno, the Nevada Humane Society led a successful No Kill initiative that has resulted in a county-wide save rate better than 90%, despite a per-capita intake rate that is over twice the national average. Reno is a shining example of a community that *could* rely on excuses for shelter killing, but instead chose to fully embrace the No Kill Equation.



Knowledge is power. Effective advocacy requires being fully informed about the No Kill movement. Nathan Winograd’s books *Redemption: The Myth of Pet Overpopulation and the No Kill Revolution in America* and *Irreconcilable Differences: The Battle for the Heart and Soul of America’s Animal Shelters* are must-reads for every No Kill activist.

Finally, familiarize yourself with the opposition's purported alternative strategy: Legislation, Education, and Sterilization (LES). The opposition will say that the real keys to saving lives are tough mandatory laws (like pet-limit laws, licensing, bans on feeding outdoor cats, and mandatory spay-neuter laws), humane education, and sterilization. It's a strategy they've been pushing for over 30 years, but that has never created a single No Kill community.

Remember, while increasing spay and neuter rates is an important part of saving lives, and community outreach is a fine goal in theory, "LES" has never achieved

No Kill success anywhere in the country. In fact, most communities that have achieved No Kill success did so even before a comprehensive, high-volume spay/neuter program was in place. Moreover, some programs of this strategy—like mandatory pet-limit laws or mandatory spay/neuter requirements—have actually increased shelter killing by increasing the number of animals surrendered to or seized by animal-control authorities. What works is the proven, cost-effective programs and policies of the No Kill Equation. It represents the future of lifesaving success, not the history of failure resulting from "LES."

No Kill Success requires a shelter to replace killing with the programs and services of the No Kill Equation for every animal, every time.

THE NO KILL EQUATION IS:

1. A Trap, Neuter, Release Program for Free-Living Cats
2. High-Volume, Low-Cost Spay/Neuter
3. Working with Rescue Groups
4. A Foster Care Program
5. Comprehensive Adoption Programs
6. Pet Retention Efforts
7. Medical and Behavioral Rehabilitation
8. Public Relations / Community Involvement
9. Working with Volunteers
10. Progressive Field Services & Proactive Redemptions
11. A Compassionate Director



Get to Know the Players In Your Community

Once you've conquered the basics of the No Kill philosophy and understand how America's shelters can dramatically reduce unnecessary shelter killing, it's time to figure out what precisely is going on in your community. After all, you cannot know what change to ask for if you do not know what your shelter and community are doing—or not doing—for companion animals already.

Take some time to speak with all of the significant animal-welfare stakeholders in your community. Go meet with the leaders of the rescue groups. Go meet with representatives of your local humane society or SPCA. Go meet with your local low-cost spay/neuter and veterinary-care providers. Find out whether these stakeholders are open or hostile to No Kill programs and policies. The answers may surprise you, and unfortunately not in a good way.

Also, go meet with your shelter director and give him or her a chance to be a hero. Let him/her know that all you want to do is save lives, and that your goal is to give him/her the tools to dramatically reduce shelter killing. There are some shelter directors who, given a chance, will embrace No Kill reforms and the necessary changes to save lives at municipal shelters. Most won't, and don't make the mistake of delaying progress by allowing them to placate you with years of empty promises. But don't walk away without first giving him or her at least one chance to demonstrate a commitment to lifesaving.

INFORMATION GATHERING

When you're meeting with your community's animal-welfare stakeholders, use these meetings as an opportunity to gather important information for your efforts:

- *What are the shelter's adoption hours? Is it open on evenings and weekends when working people are more likely to adopt?*
- *Does your shelter have an offsite adoption program? Seven days a week in multiple locations?*
- *Does your shelter have a foster program? How many animals were fostered last year? How does that compare to successful No Kill communities?*
- *Does your shelter have a TNR program? Volunteer program? Pet retention program?*
- *Does your shelter director embrace lifesaving policies? Or does your shelter director blame the public and reject all responsibility for shelter outcomes?*

Go through the steps of the No Kill Equation and determine which, if any, your shelter and community members are already implementing and how comprehensively they are. In addition, find out your shelter's funding sources, budget, and workforce. All of this information will help you figure out what needs to be changed in your community, what programs need to be added, and what barriers and obstacles you need to overcome.



STEP TWO

PREPARE FOR BATTLE

Identify Your Goals

Now that you've done your homework, it's time to start building a No Kill campaign. The first part—identifying your goals—is an easy one. Your goals are:

- **New Leadership.** The single, most important factor that will determine a community's success or failure is passionate, hard-working leadership that is not content to hide behind the "myth of pet overpopulation" or regurgitate tired clichés about "public irresponsibility." You want and the animals deserve a shelter director who takes responsibility, demands accountability, and gets the job done humanely.
- Comprehensive implementation of each and every program of **the No Kill Equation.**
- **Legislation.** You want to codify animal protection through passage of the Companion Animal Protection Act.

Together, these three goals will allow you to achieve and sustain a No Kill community (a community which saves over 90% of all animals).

Identify Your Audience

As an animal advocate, you likely won't have unlimited resources. Many advocates have full-time jobs that don't allow them to spend every minute of every hour on No Kill efforts. That's why you have to target your efforts to be as efficient as possible with both your money and your time. And part of that is targeting your message to the right audience: you don't have

to convince everybody; you just have to convince those who can make a difference for animals in your community.

Your primary audience should be the persons who have the most direct ability to save lives: (1) **the shelter director**—who single-handedly holds the keys to implementing lifesaving policies and programs, and (2) **the shelter's governing body** (this could be either a governmental body or a private board of directors)—which holds the ability to hire, fire, and heavily influence your shelter director. If your shelter is run directly by a municipal government, then your shelter's governing board will likely be a City Council or County Commission. If your shelter is run by a non-profit entity, then the shelter's governing board is the private entity's Board of Directors. Please note, however, that if a private entity runs your shelter through a contract to perform the government's animal services, then the shelter remains accountable to the government—meaning that you can still effect policy change by directing efforts towards the municipality's governing body, in addition to the non-profit Board of Directors.

Secondary audiences are those who can influence the decisions of the primary audiences. Your secondary audiences should include the **local press and the public.** There will be times when your direct efforts to influence the primary audience are ineffective; you must also target this secondary audience so they can pressure the first.

Craft Your Message

People care about animals. But they do not spend their days and nights thinking about what happens to them in shelters. It is a cliché but it bears repeating: people live busy, hectic lives. This includes media representatives, politicians, and their staff. They will not read a 50-page treatise on everything that is wrong with the shelter. They will not cull through a 10-page press release giving every

example of what the shelter has done wrong over the last year. Too often, advocates make the mistake of trying to be overly comprehensive in their information, thinking that if officials learn everything that is going on, they will support shelter reform. Unfortunately, that means they will learn nothing, because they won't read it. You have to be parsimonious.

You must focus your message to be as powerful, precise, and as clear as possible. The basic rules for communicating a No Kill message are: (1) **keep it simple**; (2) **use high-impact language**; (3) **target your message to your goals**; and (4) **repeat, repeat, repeat**. Each of these communication goals requires preparation. Plan your communication strategy and then stick to your message.

Keep it simple by using high-impact language. Focus your message so succinctly that you could

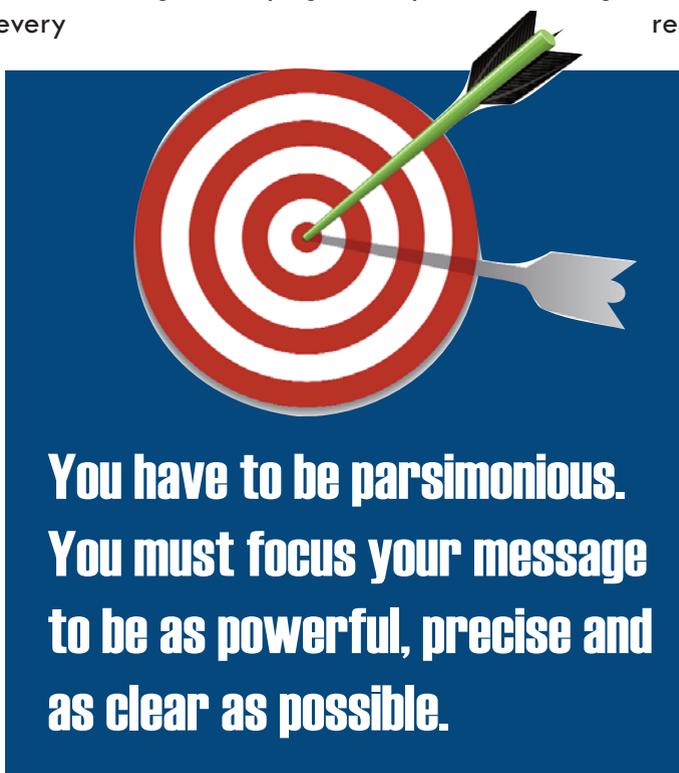
tell a complete stranger everything they need to know in 60 seconds (this is sometimes referred to as an “elevator speech”). It isn't easy, but it's necessary. For print media, you might have three to five minutes to communicate your message. For television news media, you've got about five to seven seconds. For print ads, people might read one or two sentences before flipping the page. You've got to keep it very simple. The message in Austin: “Under the current shelter manager,

Austin has killed over 100,000 dogs and cats. That's over ten thousand every year, thousands per month, hundreds per week, dozens per day, one every 12 minutes the shelter was open to the public. It does not have to be this way.”

Austin reformers fought an ASPCA-led effort to move the shelter from its centrally located downtown location to an out-of-sight,

out-of-mind location in an industrial area on the edge of town. The message to keep the shelter in its current location was simple but powerful: “If the City moves the shelter, even more animals will die.” About six months into the controversy, the press started using that theme as their own, completely changing the debate.

Finally, repeat, repeat, repeat. Pick your message and stick to it. It takes a long time for a message to stick, and you'll need to stay focused in order for your message to get through the noise of everyone else's. One consistent message is key to getting noticed.



STEP THREE

FIGHT SMART

Be Professional

One of the most important aspects of No Kill advocacy is to be professional at all times, including in your appearance, preparation, presentations, and communications.

When you meet with government officials, wear a suit; look like you've been there before and you'll be there again. Come prepared with

materials when you speak to officials, leaving behind professionally bound color copies.

To be effective, you'll need officials to believe that you're not going away—no matter how long it takes or how hard the journey is. If you lose a battle, take it on the chin and move on. Live to fight another day. And remember: it's a marathon, not a sprint. Be honest, be strong, and always tell the truth. If you lose your credibility, you may never get it back.

Build Relationships

Advocates on any issue can easily get caught up in protests, marches, Facebook debates, e-mail exchanges, and public speeches—things that are no doubt important in spreading your

Politics is about relationships. To effect change, you'll have to do it the old-fashioned way—by getting to know the decision-makers and those who can influence them in a personal way.



message to your audiences. *But politics is about relationships.* It is about “shaking hands” and “kissing babies.” If you truly want to effect change, you'll have to do it the old-fashioned way—by getting to

know the decision-makers and those who can influence them in a personal way. Protests and blogs have their role, but real change happens when people

want to help you, not when they feel that you are *forcing* them to.

So what does this mean for you? It means that instead of firing off an angry e-mail or shouting at a public meeting, take a decision-maker or stakeholder to lunch. Meet them over a cup of coffee. Get to know them and, perhaps more importantly, let them get to know you and see you as a reasonable person with valid concerns. Real relationships are far more valuable than anything else in politics.

Get Social

In addition to building relationships with policy-makers and stakeholders, there are many other advocacy tools available to No Kill advocates.

The key is to use as many tools as possible to efficiently and effectively advocate for No Kill reforms.

Online Advocacy

The easiest advocacy tool accessible to every animal advocate is the internet, and your use of the internet will be at the center of your No Kill communications campaign. First, you'll need a website with your own domain name because this is where people will go to learn about you. As with all of your communications, make sure your website is professional and easy to use. On your website, be sure to include an "about us" page that describes your mission, a "contact us" page for people to communicate with you, a frequently-asked questions page, a "how you can help" page, and a place for people to sign up for your e-mail list to keep themselves advised of ongoing issues and events. To encourage frequent visits, keep your "news" content as current as possible.

Another powerful advocacy tool is a blog. You can create your own blog through any number of free blog services, like Blogger.com and Wordpress.org. These sites are designed for frequent updating; so be sure to add timely content frequently. When you set up a blog, be sure to add a spot on the main page of your website to link to your blog. Every time you update your blog, share it with your Facebook fans and Twitter followers.

These are just a start. Stay current and learn from others. New social media tools are becoming available all the time and each can help you broaden your message and expand your reach.

Traditional Media

In No Kill advocacy, the news media must be viewed both as an audience and as a potential ally in promoting your lifesaving message. Getting the press to publicize your viewpoint and talking points will help you reach a far larger audience than you would likely otherwise would. Look to television news, newspapers and magazines, online media, and radio stations.

Focus first on members of the media who have already reported on animal welfare as they are more likely to help you than a reporter who has never shown interest in animal issues. This does not have to be a news reporter—it could also be a public-interest or charity reporter, or even a sports reporter. Second, also add to your list the general "news tip" e-mail addresses of all of the local media outlets that you will also target with your press releases; these e-mail addresses are available on their websites.



The easiest advocacy tool accessible to every animal advocate is the internet, and your use of the internet will be at the center of your No Kill communications campaign.

A well-crafted press release is one of the most effective ways to circulate your message to the media. Your one-to-two page press releases should look professional: include your logo and address, a media contact, an attention-catching headline, and text with stakeholder quotations. Press releases should read like news stories, complete with quotations and attributions; sometimes they will even be printed—without changes—in local newspapers or online. Take a look at other organizations' press releases for ideas.

But like politics, it's not just about identifying potentially interested and sympathetic media members; it's also about getting to know them, and getting them to know you. Meet them for coffee; take them to lunch. Invite them to your group's event, or offer to give them a tour of your shelter if you have one. When you've developed a relationship with a media member, don't necessarily expect that a reporter will interview you for every animal-welfare story; you can be equally—or perhaps even more—effective by being a background resource for reporters every time they want to report on animal-welfare issues. Gain their trust. Never oversell yourself or your story because you can lose your credibility with just one mistake. Don't be emotional or irrational; being effectively passionate means being calm, informed, and helpful.

 **FixAustin.org**

June 26, 2008 — FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Report: ASPCA-Led Program Results in More Killing at Austin's Animal Shelters in 2007; Competing Effort in Reno, NV, Saves Thousands.

Animal-welfare think tank FixAustin.org issues stunning report on efforts to reduce animal-shelter killing in Austin, Texas, and Reno, Nevada: Austin killed 1,361 more animals in 2007 than in 2006; Reno killed 2,752 fewer animals during the same period.

AUSTIN, TX - On June 26, 2008, animal-welfare think tank FixAustin.org released the results of competing animal-shelter reform efforts in Austin, Texas, and Reno, Nevada. After one year of efforts, Austin's shelters killed over 1,000 additional animals. Over the same period, Reno's shelters killed 2,700 fewer homeless dogs and cats.

The report is a dramatic rebuke of Austin's shelter-reform efforts, which have been led by the American Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals. After one year of the ASPCA's "Mission: Orange" project in Austin, Austin's shelters impounded more animals and killed 11% more animals than in the year prior to the ASPCA's intervention in Austin.

Commenting on the report's findings, FixAustin.org spokesman Ryan Clinton said: "Shelter-reform efforts in Austin have failed to produce positive outcomes, while Reno's efforts have proven very successful." Clinton continued, "It is time for Austin to look to new leadership in shaping its sheltering practices, and following Reno's lead would be a fine place to start."

In contrast to Austin's results, the report reveals significant improvement at Reno's animal shelters, which followed the model of the No Kill Advocacy Center, a national non-profit organization that champions "no kill" animal sheltering. After one year, Reno's shelters impounded fewer animals, killed 53% fewer animals, and increased adoptions by 45%.

The City of Austin's pound killed roughly 13,000 dogs and cats in 2007—more than 50 percent of the animals it sheltered.

FIXAUSTIN.ORG P.O. BOX 49365 AUSTIN, TEXAS 78765-9365

A well-crafted press release is one of the most effective ways to circulate your message to the media.

Advertising

Although getting press through a press release is very cost-effective, you should also consider purchasing advertisements in your local newspapers. Wait until you can afford a large ad as small advertisements do not have a significant impact. Call your newspapers' advertising departments and ask for discounted non-profit and political rates. Use humor in your ads when possible. Advertisements can both make a statement of strength and professionalism, and spread your No Kill message.

STEP FOUR

BE POLITICAL

Using the media and spreading your message online are tools for political change. They are meant to expand your campaign. They are not the campaign itself. Ultimately, all of your advocacy efforts are intended to sway those decision-makers who can actually implement or mandate the implementation of lifesaving programs and policies. Spreading your message from afar (through websites, advertisements, articles, etc.) helps, but nothing substitutes for face-to-face politics. Call and ask for a meeting with your City or County representatives (you may have to meet with a staff member first). Be prepared, be reasonable, be precise, make your case, and leave informative materials behind. Develop helpful and positive relationships with government officials and their staff. And don't leave without making "the ask." Ask them if they will commit to helping support your efforts to implement lifesaving reforms.

Part of your job as you develop relationships with government officials is to help teach and inform them about lifesaving No Kill programs and policies, and to be a resource for them as animal-welfare issues come before them. One of your best opportunities to develop such relationships is when a new candidate is building coalitions and support for a first-time campaign. Call prospective candidates and ask for meetings with them. Teach them about No Kill successes and about the failures in your community, and ask for their

FixAustin.org Animal Welfare Voter Education Guide

With three Austin City Council seats up for election on May 10, 2008, **FixAustin.org** has been contacted by countless Austinites asking the same question: **Which candidates care most about Austin's homeless pets?** After careful review of the candidates' records and responses to our questions, **FixAustin.org** has answered the call.

Laura Morrison and **Randi Shade** 🐾🐾🐾🐾

Two candidates rise above the rest when it comes to interest in, knowledge of, and passion for Austin's homeless pets: **Laura Morrison** and **Randi Shade**. **Morrison** fought the City's ill-conceived plan to relocate Austin's animal shelter from the shores of Town Lake, and intelligently engaged all stakeholders — including homeowners in East Austin — before reaching her own conclusions. **Shade** exhibits the intellect and passion needed to dramatically change the way Austin's pound does business. **Morrison** and **Shade** favor rebuilding Austin's pound on Town Lake, implementing programs that have ended shelter killing in other cities, and holding shelter management accountable for poor performance.

Allen Demling and **Jason Meeker** 🐾🐾🐾🐾

Allen Demling and **Jason Meeker** scored impressively: both favor rebuilding Austin's pound on Town Lake rather than relocating it. **Demling** offers a thoughtful approach to animal-welfare issues, and **Meeker** is unafraid to take on shelter bureaucrats mired in the status quo.

Lee Leffingwell and **Jennifer Kim** 🐾🐾🐾

Incumbents **Lee Leffingwell** and **Jennifer Kim** have each demonstrated leadership on animal-welfare issues. **Leffingwell** brokered the "compromise" plan to move the animal shelter but keep part of it open as an adoption center, and **Kim** initiated Council action to regulate the sale of unaltered pets. But both voted to relocate Austin's shelter away from the heart of the City — a decision that will mean fewer visits to Austin's pound, fewer adoptions, and even more killing.

Cid Galindo 🐾

Cid Galindo favors not only relocating Austin's animal shelter away from downtown, but also eliminating Council's commitment to keep part of the shelter open as an adoption center. **Galindo** is an intelligent and thoughtful urban planner, but he sees no role for homeless dogs and cats in his vision for downtown Austin.

FixAustin.org

FixAustin.org is Austin's only non-profit organization aiming to end the killing of lost and homeless pets through the implementation of proven, cost-effective methods that have ended shelter killing in other cities. For more information and to read the candidates' complete responses, please visit **FixAustin.org**. Some candidates were not scored due to incomplete information; these ratings are not endorsements.

Ask candidates to fill out No Kill questionnaires and rate their answers (and their record, if any) in a full-page advertisement in the local newspaper.

support. Ask them to commit to supporting No Kill reforms, introduce them to potential supporters and stakeholders, and help draw attention to their campaigns.

Finally, directly engage in the democratic process by openly supporting candidates who commit to implementing No Kill reforms—and by opposing candidates who mindlessly defend unnecessary shelter killing. Ask candidates to fill out No Kill questionnaires and rate their answers (and their record, if any) in a full-page advertisement in the local newspaper. There's nothing like a full-page ad to show candidates you are serious. Candidates who receive high animal-welfare ratings will often turn around and use those ratings in their campaigns—a win-win for all parties. (Please note that some non-profit organizations cannot engage in electioneering.)

Develop helpful and positive relationships with government officials and their staff. And don't leave without making “the ask.” Ask them if they will commit to supporting your efforts to implement lifesaving reforms.



STEP FIVE

ANTICIPATE THE OPPOSITION

The Status Quo

In any public-interest arena, the status quo has an inherent advantage, however unfair that is. Whatever is already occurring is the norm, and it is difficult to change. In the animal-sheltering arena, the status quo is comprised of shelter management, the ASPCA and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), city and county officials, the current major animal-welfare

stakeholders (local SPCAs and humane societies), and uninformed members of the press.

It is *highly likely* that these groups will oppose your efforts. They will see you as a threat and an outsider with no right to question their authority. They will fight your efforts. And they will give predictable excuses for killing and predictable responses to your efforts.

Responding to Common Anti-Reform Arguments

Thankfully, the status quo is very predictable and generally comes up with the same pro-killing arguments all over the country. This will make it easy for you to respond if you anticipate and prepare for them. These arguments include:

“It’s pet overpopulation.”

Blaming shelter killing on “pet overpopulation” is how the status quo primarily deflects blame for the results of their mismanagement. After all, if there is “pet overpopulation,” there is nothing they can do... right?

Wrong. There is no peer-reviewed study demonstrating “pet overpopulation,” and all recent analyses indicate that there are, in fact, *far more homes for pets in America than there are animals entering shelters*. In fact, there are over seven times more people acquiring pets every year than there are animals being killed in shelters for “lack of a home.” Even if most people get an animal from somewhere other than a shelter, we could still zero out the killing. It’s not about “overpopulation”; it’s about shelters competing in the market for shelter animals. When shelters compete with commercial sources of animals, animals live.

“It’s the irresponsible public’s fault.”

Shelters and politicians love to blame the public for shelter killing, even as they fail to make animals available for adoption and rescue. But however popular blaming the public is, it is just an excuse for killing; it is not a strategy for life-saving. That’s why it’s your job to offer an alternative to shelter killing in the form of the No Kill Equation.

THE STATUS QUO WILL:

- **Protect itself and consolidate power;**
- **Deny any problem exists;**
- **Attack you personally;**
- **Blame the public for the killing;**
- **Claim they are already doing what you’re demanding, or claim it won’t work (or both);**
- **Use scare tactics;**
- **Claim credit for successes and deflect blame for failures;**
- **Falsely claim reform and change;**
- **Expect you to give up and go away.**

Second, remind your audience that there is a “public” in communities that stopped shelter killing virtually overnight. The public didn’t change in that time; it was the shelters’ programs and policies that changed. And while people surrender animals to the shelter, the shelter itself is responsible for what happens to the animals once they arrive there. Finally, turn this against them. Let the public know how much disdain the director and certain

politicians have for the people of their community, the people who pay their salaries.

“We don’t have the money.”

Lack of financial resources is another tool to deflect blame—“If we only had more money,” they will argue, “we could be No Kill.” While more resources is always preferable, a national study found that per capita spending on animal control did not account for the difference be-

Remind your audience that there is a “public” in communities that stopped shelter killing virtually overnight. The public didn’t change in that time; it was the shelters’ programs and policies that changed.

tween No Kill communities and those who kill animals at disturbingly high rates. In fact, the study concluded that there is no correlation between the amount of money a shelter has and how many lives it saves. The difference, instead, is *leadership*. When leaders reject excuses and embrace lifesaving reforms, more animals leave shelters alive.

Moreover, remind your audience that many of the programs and policies of the No Kill Equation are free, low-cost, or even revenue positive. Permitting rescue groups to save animals saves both money and lives. Volunteers can provide much-needed support for free, and additional adoptions can bring in additional revenue. Offsite adoptions (which can be run by volunteers) not only increase adoptions, but they also increase shelter publicity and donations.

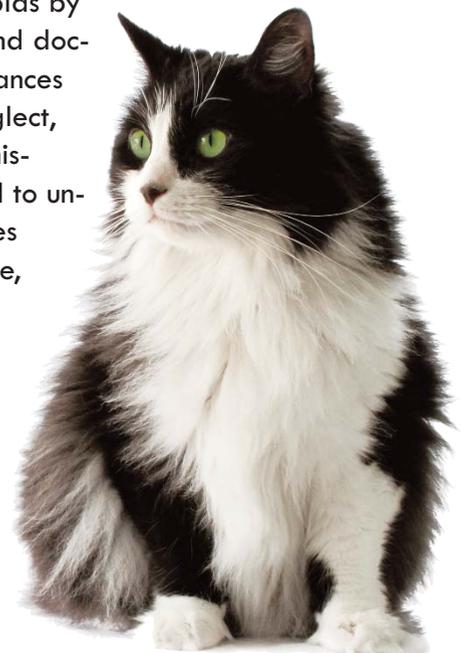
Remember: the shelters that have rigorously embraced No Kill policies and practices did not do so after they received a lot of money; the public in those communities responded with more donations and volunteer time *after* the shelter demonstrated its commitment to lifesaving by embracing the No Kill philosophy and the programs and services that make it possible. And that makes sense: do good things for animals, ask for the public’s help, and the public will support you.

“Our community is different; No Kill can’t work here.”

The No Kill Equation has worked to create No Kill communities in all types of communities—rich and poor, urban and rural, northern and southern, politically liberal and politically conservative. Claiming that something won’t work when your shelter hasn’t tried it is not only irrationally pessimistic, it’s morally indefensible. And again, blaming the public is an excuse—not a strategy for success.

“How dare you criticize animal-shelter employees, who work tirelessly every day to save animals!”

Focus on the shelter’s management and strategies rather than its employees (although in cases of animal abuse by shelter employees, don’t be afraid to criticize them, too). Compare the policies and the results of those policies (i.e., killing rates) in your community with those of more successful ones. The facts will speak for themselves. Although it will take many months (if not years) to change the press and politicians’ instinctual bias in favor of the shelter, you can cut into that bias by publicizing and documenting instances of abuse, neglect, and shelter mistakes that led to unnecessary lives lost. Over time, things will change.



Get By With a Little Help From Your Friends

Even though the status quo is and will be against you, you are not remotely alone in wanting lifesaving shelter reform in your community. In fact, when you start publicly voicing your concerns, don't be surprised if a number of people reach out to join you in your efforts. The animal-loving public supports you, too. "No Kill" efforts may not be popular with shelter directors and the status-quo animal-sheltering community, but lifesaving reforms are very popular with the public once you explain No Kill policies and programs to them. It's your job to help them understand and to get them to embrace your efforts.

Realistically, however, a small group of you will do most of the work and because of that, there will be days when you might feel you are alone, but know that you aren't. The public,

armed with the facts, will support you. And no matter how hopeless things may look, they aren't. Your sustained, unrelenting advocacy will eventually wear down the opposition. Forcing regressive shelter leaders to publicly account for harmful decisions that cause the needless deaths of animals will eventually show them for who and what they are. If you run a smart, focused campaign, if you harness the public's inherent compassion, and if you project strength, professionalism, and confidence, you will eventually succeed.



STEP SIX

BECOME THE STATUS QUO

Ultimately, your job is to break into, reform, and become the status quo because you want No Kill reforms not only to be implemented, but to become the norm for your community. This is a long-term project, not a short-term battle. Do this by getting involved with politics (donate to campaigns, host events, get to know officials, politicians, and press members). Act like you belong (dress professionally, communicate professionally, leave bound materials when meeting with officials). Stick around (it is those who quit who fail; only those who persist will prevail). Build relationships (with stakeholders, press members, and decision-makers). Define the debate (being *against* No Kill is being *for* shelter killing). And do not forget to seek laws

that mandate how the shelter must operate, even if you succeed at creating a No Kill community without them. You want to codify your success into law so that things do not backslide when leadership changes again.

In Austin, the City Council passed a law making it illegal for the shelter to kill savable animals when there are empty cages. It mandated a foster care program and offsite adoptions. And it required the shelter to reach a 90% save rate. The impact was immediate.

Likewise, for No Kill success to be long lasting, you should focus on institutionalizing No Kill by giving shelter animals the rights and protections

afforded by law. We need to regulate shelters in the same way we regulate hospitals and other agencies that hold the power over life and death. The answer lies in passing and enforcing shelter reform legislation which mandates how a shelter must operate. Laws that make it illegal for shelters to kill if there are empty cages, that require shelters to work with rescue groups, and that increase opportunities for lifesaving and adoption save lives regardless of who is running the shelter.

If you run a smart, focused campaign; if you harness the public's inherent compassion; and if you project strength, professionalism, and confidence, you will eventually succeed.

STEP SEVEN

NEVER GIVE UP!

There will be a day when the systematic killing of animals in shelters is viewed as a cruel aberration of the past; a day when No Kill programs and policies are the norm rather than the exception. Our job is to make that happen sooner rather later. And that won't happen until someone in your community steps up to the plate. That person is *you*.

It took Austin advocates five years to end the routine killing. Others are having quicker success, but do not expect it to be easy. It is a marathon, not a sprint. Our entire system of government is designed to make dramatic change difficult to effect. They expect you to give up and go home. Stay in the game for the

long haul and you'll prevail. Think about it this way: Killing is entrenched in this country. You will be ignored, dismissed, ridiculed, and attacked. They may appear invincible, but they are not. Because you have the truth, you have compassion, you have something worth fighting for, and you have the hearts and minds of the people.

If you work hard, fight smart, and never give up, you will prevail. When you do, the animals in your community will finally find in shelters a new beginning, instead of what they currently face—the end of the line. And they will find it, thanks to you. Advocates in Austin, Texas did it. Advocates in other places have, too. So can you.



Additional Resources

The No Kill Advocacy Center and Rescue Five-0 offer additional resources that can be valuable tools in the fight for a No Kill community.



Adopting Your Way Out of Killing

"You can't adopt your way out of killing." It is one of the most enduring dogmas of the animal shelter field. But it could not be more wrong. You actually *can* adopt your way out of killing. The data proves it. Experience proves it. And the No Kill Advocacy Center's 10-step guide will show you how.

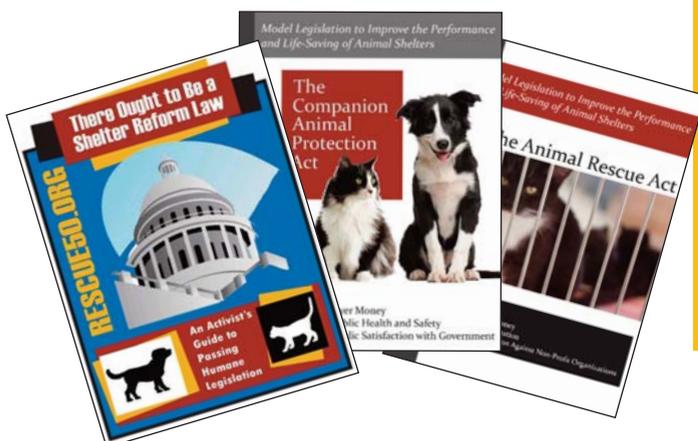
On Leadership

The most important variable for success or failure in any community is leadership. To save lives, shelters must be run by hard working, compassionate directors who are results oriented, passionate about saving lives, and offer solutions instead of excuses.



To download the following guides, visit:

Rescue50.org



Two model shelter reform laws - **The Companion Animal Protection Act** and **The Animal Rescue Act** - as well as **There Ought to Be a Shelter Reform Law** - a comprehensive guide to passing humane legislation - offer every activist the tools and knowledge to pass shelter reform legislation at the state, county or city level.





Rescue Five-O is a nationwide campaign to reform U.S. animal shelters. Rescue Five-O is a joint project of the No Kill Advocacy Center and No Kill Nation.



For more information or to request assistance, visit

Rescue50.org