48-Hour Lost Pet Reunification Programming

Starting a Short-Term Program for Found Pets

Prior to a lost pet being brought into a shelter, consider offering a short-term holding program to pet finders. Asking people who find friendly, healthy pets to make efforts to reunite the pet with their caretaker and hold them for up to 48 hours (or longer!) instead of immediately bringing the pet into the shelter's care can help increase the chances of pets being reunited and prevent.

48-Hour Program and Finder-to-Foster Differences

For a 48 hour program, the animal custody is not transferred to the shelter, though it is complementary to a finder-to-foster program and both can be piloted simultaneously. When someone finds a pet who is sick or injured, the organization may choose to intake the pet into legal custody, provide treatment, and foster the pet back to the finder. The 48-hour program may include this option but is mainly geared toward asking finders to hold pets without transferring custody to the animal services organization.

What Happens in the First 48 Hours?

The finder holds the pet in their home and attempts to reunite the pet with the owner, with support from the animal shelter. Actions the finder can and is encouraged to take include:

- Filing a found report
- Uploading photos
- Posting the pet on social channels and neighborhood/community lost and found platforms
- Posting signs near where the pet was found
- Walking them around the neighborhood in case they are recognized by a neighbor or seen by their owner
- Getting the pet scanned by a vet, police station, or the shelter for identification.

Getting Started: 48-Hour Foster Program Operations

High-Level Program Outline

Consider the following steps when implementing a new 48-hour program. Below this outline, we have provided a sample program protocol, communications recommendations and scripts, and data tracking recommendations.

- Identify all teams or roles that will need to be informed of this new program and provide sample scripts and protocols.
- Identify which teams or roles will be primarily responsible for managing this program.
  - Highlight who will be responsible for training staff and relevant volunteers on the new program and scripts

- Identify how volunteers may contribute to this program.
- Write a program description for internal use.
- Write a program description for the public.
- Draft an internal SOP including policies, procedures, and communications.
- Update data tracking processes as needed.
- Hold a staff/volunteer meeting to share details about this new program.
- Host trainings with relevant staff for public-facing communications.
- Ensure your organization's public-facing website lists all lost and found pets in your community.
- Update your organization's public-facing website with 48-hour program information and an FAQ on best practices for lost and found pets.

48 Hour Lost Pet Program Sample Protocol: Cabot Animal Support Services

This document defines the policy and procedures for helping community members find a pet's owner within the first 48 hours of finding the pet.

Internal and External Communications

- **48-Hour Practice Communications (Internal and External Buy-In)** - This document highlights steps you can take to gain buy-in for a new 48-hour program from staff, volunteers, and the community. This document includes frequently asked questions and a media pitch template.
- **48-Hour Lost Pet Program: Sample Talking Points from Cabot Animal Support Services** - This document defines the suggested verbiage and flow for in-person and over-the-phone interactions, helping community members find a pet's owner within the first 48 hours of finding the pet.
- **48-Hour Lost Pet Program: Finder TEXT/EMAIL Communication Template** - When a conversation with a finder is not doable (you are unable to talk to them in person or reach them by phone) and you would like to ask them to participate by keeping the stray pet for (at least) 48 hours, send them an email and/or text. **Note:** *We have found in some Pilot communities that individuals are more likely to respond to a text than a phone call or email!*
- **48-Hour Lost Pet Program Text/SMS Platform Recommendations** - Organizations that experience high call volumes can overcome staff time constraints and other obstacles to implementing lost pet programming by using a Text Messaging/SMS platform to automate responses and follow-up with finders of lost and loose pets. This allows the finder to receive information on lost pet reunification quickly and supports shelter staff efforts to easily follow up with finders.

Lost and Found Data Tracking Recommendations

- Found Pet Reports

- - A Found Report should be created for every call, website form submission, or in-person contact about a stray/found animal.
    - A designation in software to indicate a pet is part of a short-term foster program.
  - Outcome of Found Pet Reports
    - Canceled - If the record needs to be deleted, or if the pet is duplicated and there are several reports for the same pet.
    - Shelter - The appropriate designation to close out a found report when the pet enters shelter care/has an impound/intake.
    - Keeping - When the finder decides to adopt the pet after the stray hold.
    - Rehomed - When the finder is able to rehome the pet (outside of their own home) after the stray hold.
    - Expired – If you are using animal shelter software to track your found reports, they may automatically expire after a set amount of time (check your software configuration). If not, you should regularly audit your found reports and mark them as expired after a designated amount of time (they should remain active for a minimum of 30 days).
    - RTO/Reunited – The most typical option for closing a lost or found report (stands for Returned To Owner)
    - Any attempts at follow-up communications should be noted
  - Intake of Found Pets into Shelter
    - For 48-hour program participants; Pets that are brought to the shelter after the 48-hour window closes should have an intake record linked to the original found pet report.
  - Review Efficacy
    - Review your data with everyone involved. What was the outcome? How could the program be more effective?
    - Review data after 30, 60, and 90 days.
    - Review data again after 6 months.

Supporting Resources

Sample Flyers
- Lifeline Take 48 Bus Shelter
- Lifeline Found Pet Postcard

Additional Resources
- Stray Cat Alliance program sample